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239

ART AND ART INDUSTRIES
IN JAPAN





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WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS

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ART AND ART INDUSTRIES IN JAPAN.

INTRODUCTORY.

WHEN preparations were being made for the Great International Exhibition of 1862, the official announcement of this undertaking reached me in Japan, where I had for some time been resident as her Majesty's Minister. In that capacity I was instructed to promote the objects in view by obtaining contributions illustrative of the arts and industries of Japan, either from the Japanese themselves or from any of the foreign mercantile community willing to assist in the work. The Government of Japan of that day, however, was little disposed to take any steps in this direction. So far as the Tycoon and the Daimios, who constituted the ruling classes, were concerned, their most earnest desire was to preserve as far as possible the long-cherished isolation of the country from foreign influences and interests,—not to promote increased intercourse and extended knowledge of the nation or its resources. The few residents at the treaty ports were chiefly merchants, too much occupied with their own

affairs and efforts to establish trade on a profitable and less precarious footing to give either time or money to spread a knowledge of Japanese products out of the range of their own operations. Finding it thus impossible to count upon co-operation or assistance from natives or foreigners in a work the importance of which was manifest to me, I determined to undertake the task myself, rather than permit Japan to be unrepresented. I had been long enough in the country, both in the capital at Yédo and as a traveller through the interior, to appreciate as they deserved the artistic excellence and merits of Japanese industrial work; and had indeed already collected, for my own instruction and pleasure, a considerable number of objects illustrative of the progress and the originality of their Art. It only remained to make such further outlay as might be required to enlarge the field, carefully selecting in all the different departments of Art and Industry the most instructive and typical specimens of their workmanship and ingenuity. For this purpose I visited frequently not only the various magazines and shops in Yokohama, where the articles deemed by the Japanese themselves most attractive, or most likely to find purchasers among foreigners, were to be seen, but the less known and more important trading quarters of the capital, where only the members of the Foreign Legations were at that time allowed access. In these rich and busy quarters of a populous city, every day brought some new and interesting fabric to light, some original application of Art to industrial purposes, or examples

of artistic work of unrivalled beauty. My self-imposed duty became a labour of love, which long survived the immediate object of providing the International Exhibition with such a varied collection as should make known in England, and through England to the rest of the world, an almost unsuspected source of instruction as well as delight, in a wide range of Art industries and manufactures. I found an original school of Art existing in Japan, worthy of serious study, rich in new Art motives, and showing a rare development of the artistic faculty in a people of Oriental race too far removed from Western intercourse to have been materially influenced by any ideas of European origin. Nor was I mistaken in my estimate of the value and importance of such a public display of Japanese industries, fabrics, and artistic works. Within a very few years, on my return from Japan a second time, I found Japanese fabrics, silks, and embroideries, Japanese lacquer, china, faience, bronzes, and enamels exhibited for sale in the shops of every capital in Europe. For beauty, grace, and perfection of workmanship, variety of form, and novelty of design, they competed successfully in Paris with the best products of the Parisian ateliers, in Vienna with the Viennese specialities, and at Berlin with the celebrated iron and bronze work of that capital. Superior alike in taste, design, and workmanship, they could be sold at a price far below that of European articles of a similar kind. Since that period continuous and increasing efforts have been made, here and in other countries, to reproduce some

of the more characteristic features of Japanese Art in designs and colours. If imitation be the sincerest flattery, no greater homage could well have been paid to an incontestable superiority.

In 1867 the French International Exhibition gave a further impetus in the same direction, by showing a fine collection of Japanese objects sent over by the Japanese Government under charge of their own Commissioners, the political changes in Japan having in the interval between the dates of the two Exhibitions given a new turn to their policy. Vienna saw a similar display of Japan work at the International Exposition which took place in that capital in 1873. These three great collections were sold and dispersed, and now it is no exaggeration to say that some of the best specimens of Japanese skill and artistic work may be seen in almost every dwelling and collection or museum, where Art in any shape finds discriminating patrons. How valuable the influence of such examples of refinement in taste, perfection of workmanship, and originality of design was likely to prove, in England more especially perhaps, and in our manufacturing districts, soon became obvious. I was so impressed with this, that during a temporary absence from the East, in 1863, I willingly accepted an invitation from the Philosophical Society at Leeds, as soon as the International Exhibition enabled me to remove some of the articles in the Japan Court, to give a lecture in that busy town drawing attention to the instruction to be derived from the study of Japanese Art and its applications to industrial purposes.

The work so earnestly promoted by the Prince Consort during his life had for its object to teach the importance of Science and Art in their application to our manufactures. It formed the subject of a memorable address at Birmingham in 1855, when he laid the first stone of the Midland Counties Institution in that town; and the truth of his convictions could not have been better shown than in the results so generally following the introduction of Japanese works into this country.

Mr. John Leighton in the spring of 1863 also gave a very interesting and suggestive lecture at the Royal Institution on Japanese Art. Referring to the Japanese Court in the International Exhibition, he describes it as “divided by a gulf of six feet from China, which it immeasurably distanced—an enchanted island of great beauty around which visitors were never tired of travelling. The collection, though somewhat crowded, was beautifully arranged by Sir Rutherford Alcock,* to whom we are indebted for the collection of objects.” I should not here quote from the “Discourse,” subsequently printed in the proceedings of the Institution, were it not for the curious circumstance that Mr. G. A. Audsley, of Liverpool (who delivered a lecture on the same subject some ten years later) seemed to be unaware that there had ever been a “Japan Court,” in which a collection of many hundred specimens of almost every kind of Japanese Art and Art industries was exhibited. I

* I can claim no credit for this, being absent at my post. I was indebted to some kind friends for the tasteful arrangement of the multifarious objects which I had sent to the Exhibition.

must infer this from the Introduction to a very splendid work now in course of publication by Mr. Audsley, associated with Mr. Bowes, on the "Keramic Art of Japan,"* in which the world is informed that "Europe, comparatively speaking, knew but little of the subject of Japanese Art prior to the Paris Exposition of 1867." "Previous to the year 1867," he continues, "our knowledge of Japanese Art was chiefly derived from the objects imported into Europe by the Dutch traders, from the presents given to the several embassies that have visited Japan, and the articles collected and described by such travellers in the country as Kæmpfer and Siebold."

I can only conclude from this that Messrs. Audsley and Bowes have written their book in ignorance that a collection carefully made in Japan by myself in much more recent times had been exhibited in this country. Their opinions, therefore, cannot be very safely followed as to the sources of information, or the materials for judgment on Japanese Art and productions by which England had been enabled to profit several years before either the Paris Exhibition or their own labours commenced. If we may judge by the list they furnish of the collections from which they have drawn their illustrations, they do not seem very well informed as to the materials available even at the present time. Mr. Alt, who last year allowed a very rich and varied collection of Japanese objects to be exhibited at the Bethnal Green

* "Keramic Art of Japan." Audsley and Bowes, Liverpool: published for the subscribers by the Authors. London: Henry Sotheran & Co. 1875.

Museum, is unnoticed, among several others known to possess many rare and interesting specimens of the most characteristic kind. As far as I am personally concerned, it is a very trivial matter, but as regards the fact, I am not willing that the credit of priority which is due to England should be given to France. I am glad in other respects to bear testimony to the valuable addition to our knowledge which the elaborate work of Messrs. Audsley and Bowes will furnish when completed. The title, indeed, scarcely does justice to the larger scope of the book, for both in illustrative plates and in the letterpress of the introductory essay, there is a great deal more than the "Keramic Art of Japan" to be found in the parts already published.

The authors rightly state, as a reason for its appearance, that no treatise specially devoted to the subject of Japanese Art had previously been published by any of the travellers in Japan. When the articles on "Japanese Art" which are included in this volume first appeared in the *Art Journal*, it is quite true that little effort had been made through the press to direct attention to the subject. The possession by Japan of one of the few original schools of Art the world has produced, and the rich mine of Industrial Art to be found in the various branches of manufacture which the skill and ingenuity of the Japanese have carried to great perfection, had not, that I am aware, been the subject of any separate work. Subsequently to that date, however, not only the illustrated work of Messrs. Audsley

and Bowes has been issuing from the press in parts, but a volume of less costly character, entitled “A Glimpse at the Art of Japan,”* by Mr. Jackson Jarves, has been published in America. With the advantage, which can hardly be over-estimated, of a long residence in Japan, the author of this last work has been enabled to take a survey of the whole field of Japanese Art, with its associated industries, and to give a critical opinion in a more complete and exhaustive manner than has hitherto been attempted.

Had these two works made their appearance earlier, it is probable that the articles which form the foundation of the present volume would never have been written. But having actually appeared in print, at irregular intervals during the past two years, and necessarily in a somewhat desultory and incomplete shape, I have felt it might not be a useless labour to give them a more connected form, and, in recasting them, to pass in review what these, and other writers in a more fragmentary way, have written on the subject of Japanese Art, and its industrial applications in the production of a vast variety of objects for ornament or daily use. Where the writers seemed to me to have left little to be desired in their descriptions and criticisms, I have preferred quoting their own words, while freely expressing my own opinion when it differed from that

* “A Glimpse at the Art of Japan,” by James Jackson Jarves, author of “Art Studies,” “Art Idea,” “Art Thoughts,” &c., Honorary Member of the Academy of Fine Arts, Florence, Italy, &c. &c. New York: published by Hurd and Houghton, Cambridge. 1876.

of others. In this manner I trust the reader may find, in addition to any original matter which a residence of some years in Japan may have enabled me to offer, a tolerably complete digest of what has been said by others bearing on the subject, and thus possess within a small compass a more satisfactory review of Japanese Art than would have been possible under other conditions. With this object I may say to the readers of the *Art Journal*, that I have supplied many links wanting in the original articles for a complete survey; and a concluding chapter, in which it has been my endeavour in a general summary to point out what seem to be the principles of Art, which in a great degree govern all Japanese work of an artistic or decorative character. And as regards the perfection of their workmanship and mastery over almost every kind of material, it has been my aim to draw such practical conclusions as may be turned to useful account by our own artisans and manufacturers.

The Japanese have been styled a "nation of artists;" and if, as I believe, artistic tendencies pre-eminently distinguish them, no less than the ancient Greeks, I think the title has been fitly given, and will be found fully justified by their achievements in the Art domain.

I am not unmindful that Lord Derby, in a recent speech at Liverpool, is reported to have said, "There were not six men in the country qualified to speak with authority upon Art;" and if this be true, as it may well happen, I make no pretension to be one of so select a party. But I believe many in a more

humble way may be entitled to offer materials for thought and judgment, and in that manner to contribute something to the advancement of Art and Art Industry in our own country. This little volume is but the complement and fitting end to the work begun in Japan in 1862, when I occupied myself in collecting, for the gratification of the cultured and the instruction of the working and industrial classes of England, evidence of what Art had done for the *Japanese and their industries*.

Some attempt has been made to draw a broad line between Industrial and Fine Art, or, as it has been stated, between Art marketable and speculative. But I cannot help thinking that no sharp or well-defined division exists. Industrial Art requirements are innumerable, and extend into every department of artistic work, from the labours of Michael Angelo in the decoration of the Sistine Chapel at Rome, or those of Raphael in the Loggie of the Vatican, to the infinite variety of jars, vases, and tazzas, in faience, porcelain, and enamel, to be seen in our shop-windows. From the middle of the fourteenth century, when Lucca della Robia first introduced his glazed terra-cotta figures in relief as decorations for churches and palaces, to the present day, faience, porcelain, and work in metals have filled up an immense space in the history of Art. The celebrated ware of Henri II., the majolica, and, in later times, the porcelain of the great manufactories of Dresden and Sèvres, have been at once Industrial and Fine Art, made for sale

and “marketable,” yet mingling in their claims to admiration ever-varying degrees of Art and handicraft, according as a Raphael, a Benvenuto Cellini, a Palissy, or inferior hands may have been employed in their production. As to Art being degraded, or ceasing to be Art, by being made subservient to use and the production of a marketable commodity, “on a basis of money value,” it may be a question whether more benefit is not conferred upon mankind by the application of Art to the most common industrial products of the ironfounder, the potter, and the builder or architect, than by painters of historical pictures, or sculptors. The great works of the Sculptor and the Painter, it has been truly remarked, however beautiful, are seen by few, and soon disappear from public view; while the former are always in sight, and tend to cultivate the taste of the million and give refinement, by bringing constantly before their eyes objects of taste,—not less effective because they are unconsciously felt and enjoyed. That Art which can give a priceless value to the commonest and least costly material—such as clay and iron—by the mere impress of genius and taste, and out of the coarsest matter create objects either for ornament or use, affording constant satisfaction to a sense of beauty and fitness, is the Art which I believe to be the most precious, tested by any true estimate of value and utility.

The Japanese, more signally than any modern nation, seem, to quote Mr. Jarves’ words, to enjoy “the faculty of making common things and little things tell more

pleasurably to the fancy as artistic surprises, and fresh interpretations of the ordinary phenomena of nature and society ;”—and in this lies one of their greatest merits. With these few lines by way of explanation as to the contents and aim of the following pages, I venture to introduce the reader to the guild of Japanese Artists, with all their exuberance of fancy and facility of execution—their extravagance of humour, and enthusiasm for Art, of which my vehement friend, who figures in the illustration below, may serve as a type, while his fellow-workers supply a running commentary on the social existence and artistic life of those who find their greatest happiness and enjoyment in the artistic character and excellence of their work.



CHAPTER I.

THE RANGE AND SCOPE OF JAPANESE ART, AND ITS CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS.

I DO not propose on the present occasion to take up the question glanced at in a previous work on Japan,* namely, the influence which Art and Art culture may have exercised in producing the peculiar type of Eastern character and civilisation developed by the people of that country. In a chapter devoted to the "Progress of Civilisation in Japan," I could only offer a few brief hints on the subject of Japanese Art in subordination to the main question, namely, what stage of progress and kind of civilisation had been attained by a nation so long and completely isolated from the rest of the world? The part which the Art faculty and its development by very general culture for many ages—as evidenced by the numerous Art industries which its people had carried to an unrivalled degree of perfection—may have played in the process of civilisation, was no doubt a question of great interest.

* "The Capital of the Tycoon; or, a Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in Japan." By Sir Rutherford Alcock, K.C.B., her Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Japan. Longman, Green & Co.

And a detailed description of Japanese Art in all its industrial applications—in plastic and textile materials no less than in metals, ivory, wood, and a great variety of modifications and adaptations of these for purposes of decoration and utility—had once entered into my thoughts. But it soon became evident that the field was too wide, and the subject one which would require a separate work to do it justice. I had to content myself, therefore, with a very cursory notice of the indications of national character, customs, and history supplied by Japanese popular Art.

My present aim will be to indicate what the Japanese seem to have done for Art, in creating a new and, to a great degree, an original school of decorative design, and its novel application to a large group of Art industries, rather than the converse,—of what Art may have done for them, as an æsthetic and a civilising agent. More especially it will be my object to trace the principles evolved in the exercise of the Art faculty, which seem to underlie all excellence in their work; and to determine how far these are new, or different in essential points from those which have been accepted in Europe.

An observation made in reference to a work of Paul Lacroix on the “Manners, Customs, and Dress during the Middle Ages,” is singularly applicable to Japanese designs, namely, that they “furnish a marvellously complete picture of the domestic and national life,”—the life of a strangely constituted race, unlike any other in their isolated state during a long succession of centuries,—and with “a truth and force which can

hardly be missed, notwithstanding the grotesqueness which mingles with them all, through the artistic defects in the drawings themselves." It is still more true that, viewed as artistic feats expressing realities, "they are as unlike our modern performances, from Academy exhibitions down to children's Christmas books, as can well be conceived." No less strikingly apposite is a remark made originally in reference to the picturesque and very interesting illustrations of Indian Art and Architecture during the centuries preceding and following the Christian era, to be found in Mr. James Fergusson's "Fire and Serpent Worship." "We find ourselves," the critic says, "watching the growth of a form of Art, which was uninfluenced by any external or foreign element, and left to its own innate powers of development."

Of high Art, such as has been cultivated in Europe since the dark ages, the Japanese know nothing. But the range of true artistic work in its application to industrial purposes in Japan is very wide, and more varied than anywhere in Europe. There are a peculiar grace and delicacy, both of design and execution, in all their work, even in utensils for the common purposes of daily life, which recall the relics dug out of the ruins of Pompeii, or the Etruscan tombs of an earlier date, so recently discovered in an ancient cemetery at Bologna; while in point of finish, nothing that has come down to us from ancient times—unless it be the cut gems and cameos—approaches the best Japanese work.

In architecture, the Japanese, like their neighbours

the Chinese, have produced scarcely anything—not even as much, indeed, as the latter, for these may claim the pagoda as a creation of their own, and one which is still peculiar to their country. The instability of the soil in Japan, from perpetually recurring earthquakes, has probably precluded any artistic development in this direction. A roof supported on wooden pillars which rest on the surface of the ground, and are tied together above by connecting beams, the whole building rarely rising beyond a first story, is the construction which probably gives the greatest security against a swaying horizontal motion communicated from below, but it does not allow much scope for artistic treatment. Walls are with them but screens to keep out the weather or secure privacy, and are never used for supports to the roof. That they should be poor, therefore, in architectural work may be only a natural consequence of living in a land of volcanoes and earthquakes. No *Taj*, with its fairy-like grace and symmetry can soar into mid-air, under the volcanic conditions of the soil. No minaret and lofty dome can give new forms of beauty to the eye, with all the mingled grace and solidity which characterize the Saracenic and Indian architecture. Not in this direction must we look for even the faintest indications of the artistic faculty in Japan. We must be content to search for these much nearer to the level of the eye, and inside their dwellings, rather than in any exterior adornments of temple or of Daimio's *yashiki*. They lavish carving and ornament on the turned-up corners and curved edges of the overhanging and cumbrous roofs; but nothing can

redeem them from a ponderous, unartistic, and top-heavy appearance.

Mr. Gladstone, in an interesting article which appeared not long since in the *Contemporary Review*, speaks of that "vast and diversified region of human life and action, where a distinct purpose of utility is pursued, and where the instrument employed aspires to an outward form of beauty;" and he observes, "here lies the great mass and substance of the *Kunst-leben*—the Art-life of a people." This most aptly expresses the only form in which Art seems hitherto to have taken any development in Japan, or any hold on the Japanese mind. But if Art in this form be, as I think, the first stage of progress in all countries towards the higher Art which has immortalised ancient Greece, and, in later ages, Italy, Spain, Flanders, and other Western countries—and if a people's artistic power and capabilities be judged by the perfection to which they carry this preliminary stage—then the Japanese will be entitled to take high rank, even among the most refined and cultured nations of the West. It has been remarked of Thornhill, in a depreciatory spirit, that his works were "chiefly allegorical; and, though they show great invention and genius, do not rise above the character of decorative Art." But to this it has been well said in reply, that nearly all the finest works, whether of sculpture or painting, have been produced *with a purely decorative purpose*. The pediment, and metopes, and frieze of the Parthenon, by Phidias and his school, the temple at Egina, and many other cele-

brated Greek edifices, are instances in point. It is indeed a curious kind of disparagement to say of a painter that his art was no more than decorative, when one of the greatest of Italian painters thought it not beneath his genius to make the elaborate designs which ornament the *Loggie* of the Vatican, and his most celebrated cartoons as patterns for tapestry.

As to the general beauty and excellence of Japanese decorative work, Baron Hübner, one of the latest and most cultivated of the many travellers in Japan, bears emphatic testimony in his pleasant "*Promenade autour du Monde.*" He remarks that—"Le goût du grotesque et la recherche du beau, le raffinement et la perfection technique, la fécondité d'imagination et un sentiment délicat de la nature, l'un et l'autre contenus par les exigences de la théogonie indienne et la sainteté du lieu—voilà les caractéristiques des merveilles répandues avec profusion dans les dernières demeures des Shoguns. Une chose m'a vivement intrigué; c'est l'empreinte incontestable, évidente, palpable de *baroquisme* Italien que portent plusieurs sculptures. Dès qu'on passe aux oiseaux, aux fleurs, aux nuages, aux vagues, on sort des anciennes ornières, on prend des allures plus libres, et on produit des œuvres qui semblent sortir des ateliers du Borromini ou du Bernin. Explique qui pourra ce fait étrange!" This *baroquisme*, however, to which Baron Hübner refers as so strange and difficult to explain, has, I believe, nothing Italian in it. I think it is indigenous and perfectly original—the result of a marked aversion to the equal division of

parts, or repetition of equal measurements, due to their close study of Nature. They dislike formal lines corresponding to each other, either numerically or by measurement; and this feeling underlies all their artistic work, as will presently be seen. The Japanese ideas of symmetry are something quite different from those which prevail among Western nations, but it does not follow that they have a less perfect conception of symmetrical order and harmony. Lord Napier and Ettrick has truly said, in a very instructive lecture addressed to natives on the "Fine Arts in India :" "Because the European nation to which your destinies are attached possesses higher scientific knowledge, greater mechanical knowledge, juster principles of government, and superior energy in war, it does not at all follow that, in matters of fancy or taste, that nation has a monopoly of what is beautiful and what is true." It does not even follow, that this superiority in one direction should carry with it any pre-eminence in matters of art, taste, or fancy. As regards Orientals generally, it is the converse rather which holds good. With respect to the Japanese, I think I shall be able to show conclusively that they have derived their fundamental ideas of symmetry from a close study of Nature, and her processes in providing for variety.

It will be gathered, from these preliminary remarks, that I do not conceive any justice can be done to the subject of Japanese Art, if it be treated merely as a question of comparative excellence in the production of great artistic works such as our painters and sculptors

produce. It is that no doubt to some extent, but there is much more to be considered. I think with a Royal Academician* that “the Arts are the landmarks of civilisation. By their means we are instructed no less in the social progress than in the extent of refinement to which at various periods the most celebrated nations of the earth have arrived. The language of Art, the means which the graphic and plastic arts supplied, were among the earliest employed by the nations of antiquity for the expression of their religious aspirations—recorded in characters and forms of objects with which they were familiar, subordinated to an imaginative treatment which was not the mere result of accident, but a studied reflection of their spiritual wants as well as of their social condition.”

Taking this wider view of Art, and all that its application suggests in relation to the progress and the life of a people, and our estimate of their culture, I should think it unfair to the Japanese if I were to speak of their artistic development without seeking to show under what influences they have worked out their *Kunst-leben*, and upon what principles they seem to have proceeded in giving Art-expression to their national life and traditions. If it be true, as I think it is, that they have worked upon original lines, and produced something very different in many respects from anything previously known—drawing their leading ideas from a study of Nature, and inspired by the per-

* See Lectures on Art by S. A. Hart, R.A., delivered at the Royal Academy, 1855, and reported in the *Athenæum*.

ception of some of the more subtle principles which govern the evolution of grace and beauty in the vegetable and animal kingdoms—it can scarcely fail to be interesting to note with some particularity both the processes and the results.

It would seem that Hogarth, guided by his own genius, and similar habits of close observation, possessed himself of the secret which the Japanese have been turning to profit for so many centuries. In his “Analysis of Beauty,” written, as he tells us, with a view of “fixing the fluctuating ideas of taste,” he endeavours to show that “*the principles are in Nature* by which we are directed to call the forms of some bodies beautiful, others ugly, some graceful, and others the reverse, by considering, more minutely than has hitherto been done, the nature of those lines and their different combinations, which serve to raise in the mind *the ideas of all the variety of forms imaginable;*” and he suggests that those principles are discoverable. So also, in his chapter on “Variety,” he again insists upon this quality as underlying all excellence. “How great a share variety,” he says, “has in producing beauty may be seen in the ornamental part of Nature. The shapes and colours of plants, flowers, leaves, the paintings in butterflies’ wings, shells, &c., seem of little other intended use than that of entertaining the eye with the pleasure of variety. All the senses delight in it, and are equally averse to sameness.” The Japanese, thoroughly imbued with this feeling, have adopted the principle of variety as the fundamental condition of

artistic work, and evinced a persistent aversion to sameness, or a too great uniformity and regularity. They have, either from instinct or æsthetic tendencies and love of variety combined, been close observers of the methods by which *in Nature the greatest imaginable variety* is secured. Taking this leading principle, and the source from whence they derived their canons of taste for our guide, I will now endeavour to show what kind of Art it has developed.

Mr. John Leighton, in his "Discourse," delivered at the Royal Institution in 1863, pointed this out, as one

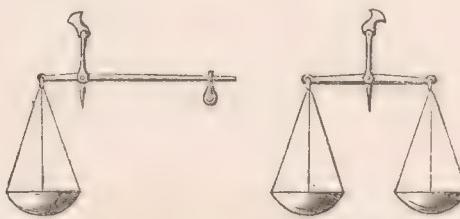


Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

governing principle of all the artistic work of the Japanese; and remarked that the greater the variety of material and the more numerous the works, the more distinctly it is recognisable as everywhere prevailing. This principle is the studious avoidance of exact repetition, or a counterpart of lines or spaces; and if they find them, he observes, they invariably, and by a sort of instinctive feeling, "do all they can by means of decoration to destroy an exact division or repetition of any portion." It would be easy to furnish illustrations. Mr. Leighton, in his lecture, gave the steelyards in use by the Japanese (Fig. 1), showing how they "shun an equality of parts,

or rather the appearance of an equality." They give weight in another way than by diametrical division, as



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

with the scales when the suspension is from the centre, and must be so exactly (Fig. 2). So there seems to be, as he also points out, an innate repugnance in the



Fig. 5.

Japanese mind to any diametrical division if it can be avoided. The equal division of a parallelogram has

not variety enough for them; they follow "the precedent of Nature, who never repeats herself, whether in spangling the skies with stars or the earth with daisies of the field." Hence, whenever this form of parallelogram has to be encountered, they never divide it down the centre as in Fig. 3, but invariably as in

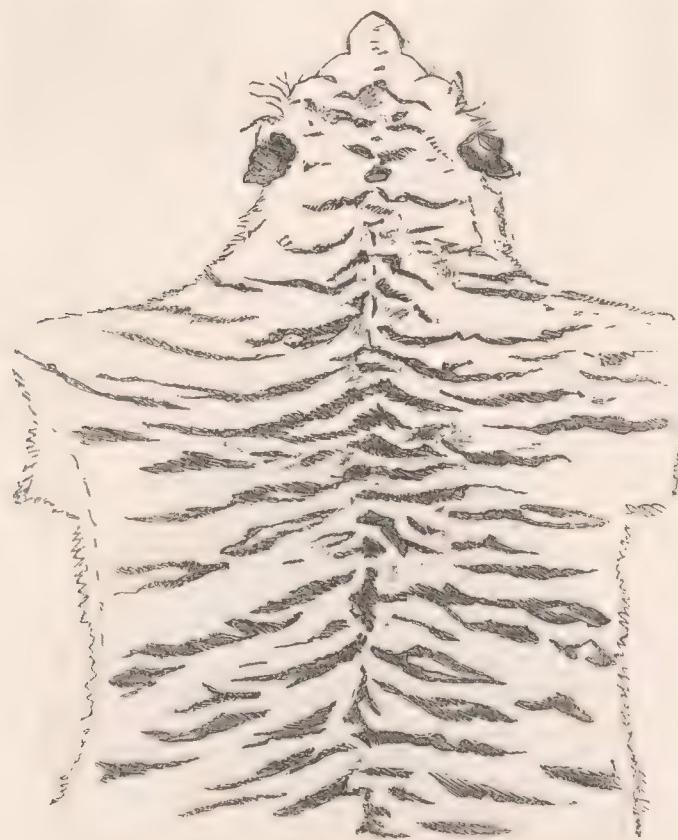


Fig. 6.

Fig. 4, or break any equal division by other devices, as in the ornamentation of lacquer boxes (see p. 23).

Even a circular top offends as too regular, and they get rid of the effect by a pattern distracting the eye from the regularity of a perfect circle (see Fig. 5, p. 23). This principle, so invariably acted upon in all their

handiwork, whether a simple set of shelves, a box, a bookcase, or an ornamental piece of screenwork, is so much a matter of habit, that Europeans would seek in vain to get a Japanese wood-carver or cabinet-maker to fashion the commonest article for him on any other, unless bound down by a pattern. A Japanese servant will not arrange the furniture of a drawing-room occupied by foreigners and filled with a variety of chairs,

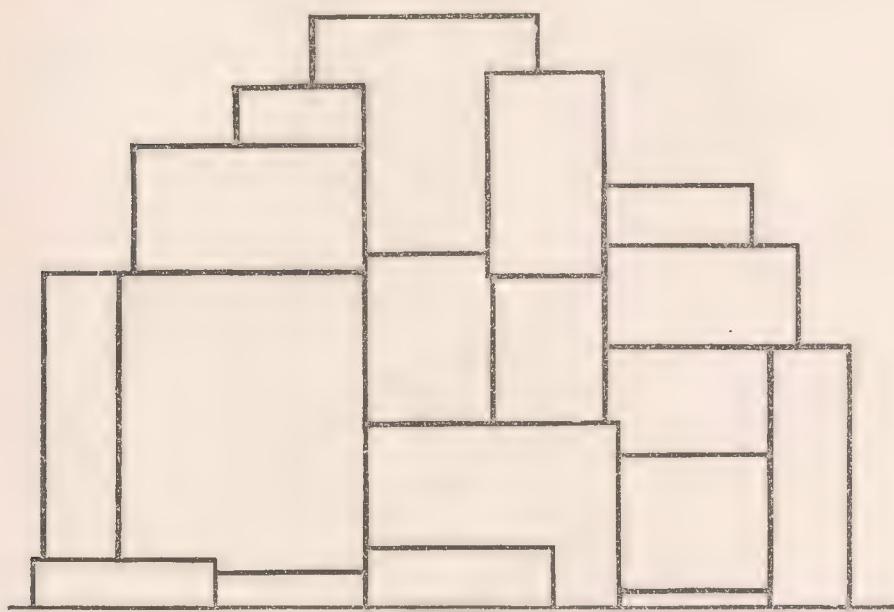


Fig. 7.

tables, &c., without an instinctive regard to the same idea. Even when the Japanese ostensibly adopt geometric figures, they show the same ingenuity in obtaining variation in repetition of lines.

That they have gone to Nature for their teaching may be easily verified by the study of almost any natural object: a flower, or the striped skin of an animal will equally answer the purpose. Fig. 6, for example, is

the skin of a tiger, illustrating the process by which symmetry and a sense of harmony and order may be obtained by a balance of unequal parts on the two sides of a mesial line.

The application of this by the Japanese may, perhaps,



Fig. 8.

best be shown by reference to the arrangement of divisions and shelves in their *étagères*. Fig. 7, p. 25, affords an example; no two divisions, it will be observed, are exactly alike or equal—no two are ever repeated on the same line.

In their common hand-screens or fans the same rule

will always be found to prevail, and so ingeniously adapted that it is productive of almost infinite variety. Here are two examples out of a hundred, taken at hazard, not as absolutely the best, but sufficiently illustrative. It will be noticed in Fig. 8 how elaborately

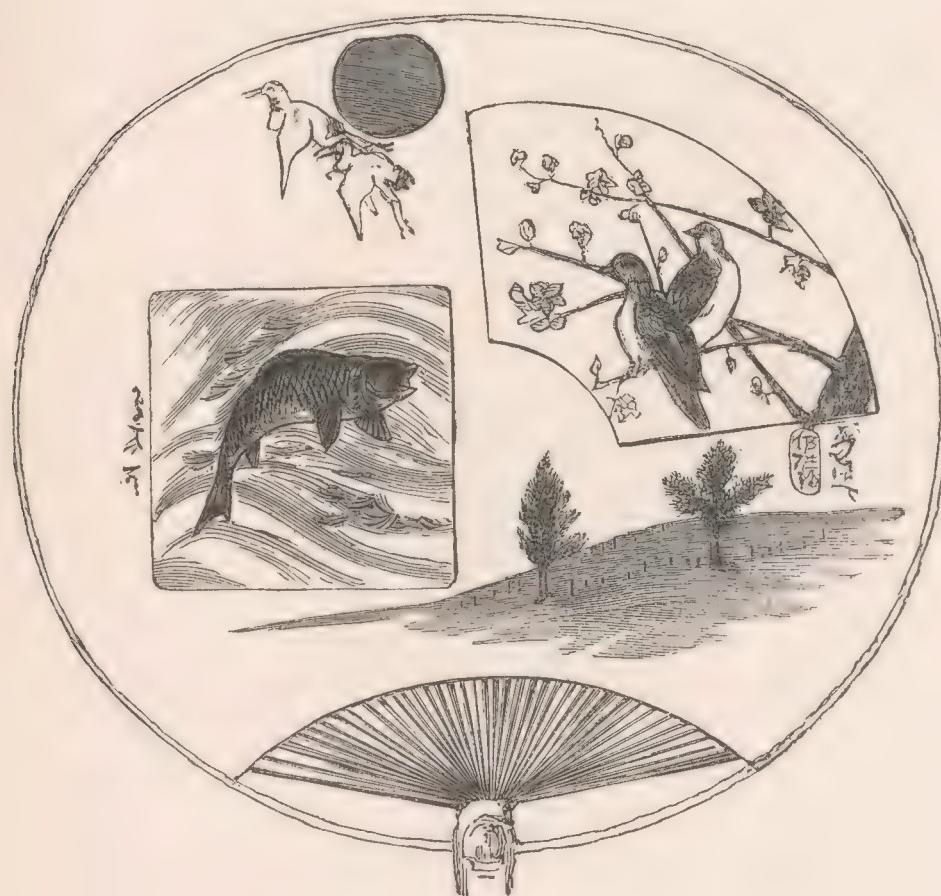


Fig. 9.

and ingeniously the squares and circles which form the chief objects are broken in their line, as well as varied in their shapes.

Fig. 9 affords a still simpler example, consisting only of two principal outlines, a square and a fan-shape; but

with birds and the sun above, and a landscape below, the same effect is secured.

Even a square box is often broken in line by a semblance of two together—the one beneath the other, in the form of Fig. 10. In this instance the original, a small lacquer box, is covered with a fine diaper pattern, although Mr. Leighton was led to conclude that “diapers and other conventionalised forms were not so popular with them as with us.” They resort to them,

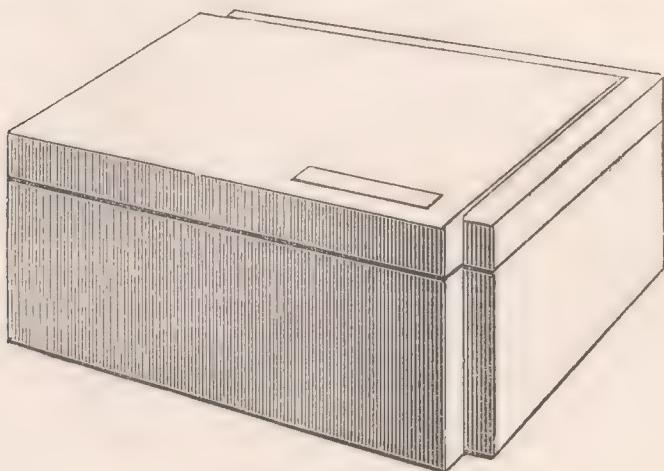


Fig. 10.

however, very freely, as aids in securing variety for the ornamentation of large surfaces.

If a lacquer box, on which they often lavish all their art, be the subject of treatment, they will obtain variety even when they employ the same or a similar design twice repeated—a rare thing with them—by not only varying more or less the pattern, but placing each one in a different position (Fig. 11). In one of the branches it will be observed a second cone has been added, while they are placed diagonally in respect to each other,

avoiding a level line. The perfection of the workmanship in this specimen shows a true love for the work, as well as rare delicacy of hand, and there is something

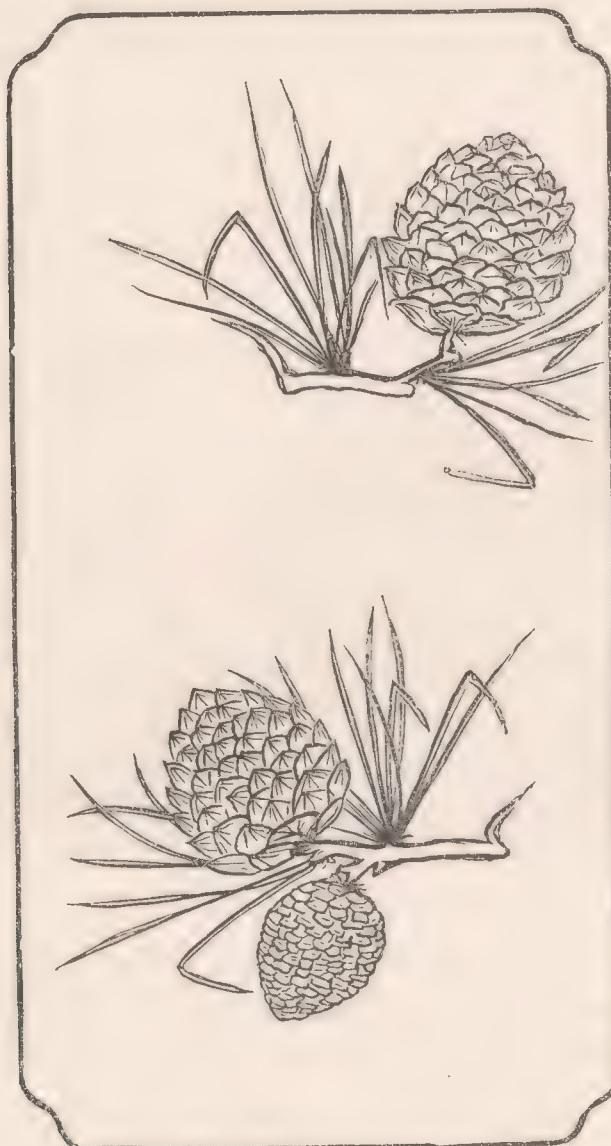


Fig. II.

very subtle in the mode by which the workman has effected his object in the disposition of the two designs —reversed and at a slightly different angle, as well as on a different level.

The illustrations of the same principle are infinite. One more must suffice. Here is a lacquer letter-box, one of those now so commonly seen in the shop-windows in England and all over Europe,—yet scarcely any two can be found alike (Fig. 12). It may be observed that each one of the three objects on the lid differs in form, and the angle at which they are placed is equally varied. No two exactly correspond in any particular with the other; while they are partly carried over the

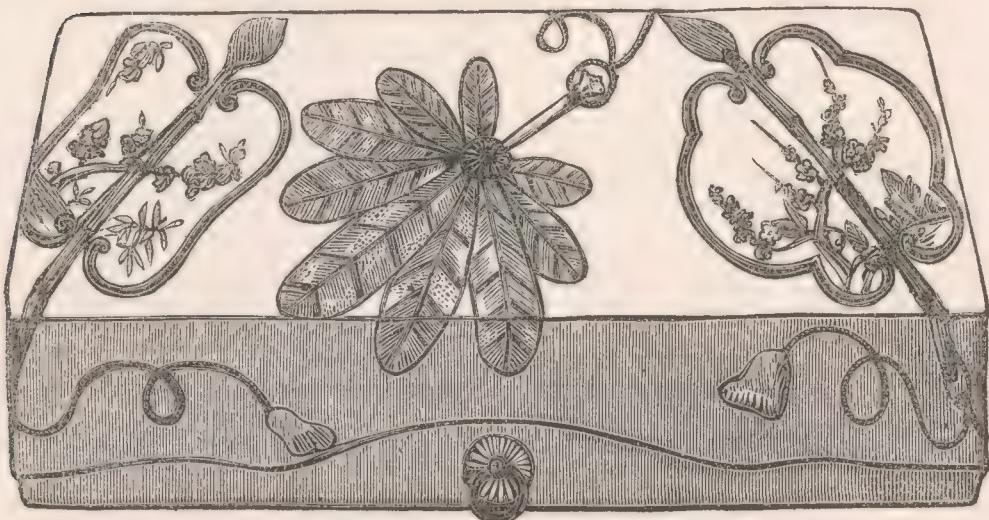


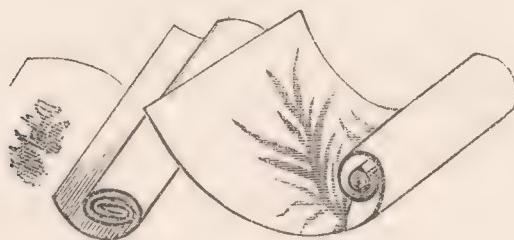
Fig. 12.

edge, as well as the silken cord, to give an artistic effect of carelessness, and destroy everything approaching a studied plan or formality.

We have thus seen, in a great variety of materials and adaptations of artistic work for common uses, how steadfastly the Japanese adhere to this principle of eschewing equal divisions of parts, exact repetition of similar forms, or counterparts of lines and spaces. This is one of their secrets for the production of infinite

variety, and the avoidance of even the semblance of monotony or sameness—a fundamental canon of taste which governs all Art-expression and work in Japan. Rich in fancy, all servile repetition of the parts of a design is interdicted as an offence against good taste, and betraying a poverty of invention incompatible with true inspiration or artistic work of any kind. May not much of this be due to the fact that nearly all work in Japan is handwork—allowing full scope for human aptitudes and individual tastes? Little is done by machinery of any kind. The machine multiplies, but the man varies.

Something of this kind may have been in Mr. Ruskin's mind the other day, when replying to an invitation addressed to him by the committee of a provincial school of Art: he told them, "Nothing can advance Art in any district of this accursed machine-and-devil-driven England till she changes her mind in many things."



CHAPTER II.

JAPANESE IDEA OF SYMMETRY IN CONNECTION WITH VARIETY.

IN the last chapter frequent reference was made to *variety* as an element which underlies all Japanese work, and is in fact a governing principle. The love of variety and novelty which is common to the human race, has been cultivated and developed among the Japanese, until it has become almost a passion, giving shape and character to all their Art. Of the thousands of cheap fans now scattered over Europe, I doubt whether any two would be found exactly alike. In this distinguishing feature of their artistic work they have gone to Nature for their inspiration; and as it is mainly to these two sources, their love of Nature and their love of variety, that Japanese Art owes much of its special charm as well as its originality, the object they proposed to themselves, and the means they have taken to attain it, seem worthy of further inquiry.

It has been suggested that a good deal of this variety so constantly pervading all their work may be attributed to the absence of machinery. This again may be due, in some measure at least, to the low stage of

mechanical science in Japan, and the cheapness of labour—conditions rapidly disappearing there as elsewhere, from the progress of European civilisation, the creation of new wants, and other causes. For this reason alone, if for no other, we must anticipate at no distant period the rapid decadence of the Arts in Japan as we have hitherto known them—with that variety of design and individuality of expression which constitute the artistic merit of all Japanese work. This is something quite distinct from mere educated and careful craftsmanship, of which there is no lack in England and elsewhere, in connection with Art. With us, there is a preponderance of skilled work over special Art gift. We may define this as invention, genius, imagination, or Art insight—it matters little perhaps what we call the gift—for gift it is which enables the artist to transfuse his individuality into his work, be it picture or pottery, and leave the impress of his own mind, and not another's, upon it. Machinery, as the foreign demand increases, and with it the price of labour, will inevitably take the place of handwork. When a workman—artist or artisan—can no longer bestow a year's loving care and labour on a single tea service or a lacquered cabinet, because no one will give the price necessary to supply his wants for that time, machinery will be brought into play, and multiply inferior copies at a rapid and cheaper rate. But man is the only machine that varies, with each touch of the brush or turn of the hand and tool. Japan will undoubtedly be able to supply its machine-made wares in greater numbers and at a

cheaper rate; but they will have lost their peculiar *cachet*, if not all that now constitutes their charm to the artist, and the true lover of work which bears the impress of individual genius and feeling as well as skill.

In some things there may be a gain rather than a loss. Watches, chronometers, and clocks may be more truly turned by machinery than by hand, and so of many instruments and objects of utility for daily use. It would be too sad, if in return for the loss of so much that is admirable in variety and individuality, there were not some counterbalancing advantages, though these may prove to be all on the side of utility, and to the prejudice of beauty and originality. But to return to our inquiry, I think it will be seen that the true secret of the unrivalled success of the Japanese in those branches of Art in which they have most excelled, is to be found more especially in their loving and patient study of all the *processes* in Nature—in other words, the methods by which the *greatest variety* as well as beauty is secured. They have gone to the ornamental part of Nature's works—to the combination of forms and colours observable in plants, flowers, and leaves, in the painting of butterflies' wings, the skins of animals, the plumage of birds, and markings of shells—for their models. In a word, to all that constitutes the glory and the beauty of the visible world, and ministers with unfailing success and lavish bounty to the sense of beauty and harmony. Hogarth was quite right in asserting that the principles are in Nature by which we are guided in determining what

is truly beautiful or graceful and excellent in Art. The Japanese went, therefore, to the fountain-head in going to Nature, and there reverently watching and studying the processes by which such infinite variety and beauty are unceasingly evolved, they obtained the power of following in the same lines. It was natural that in profound sympathy with Nature and admiration of all her works, in which beauty and variety are the leading and characteristic features, they should contract a corresponding aversion to sameness, and any appearance of uniformity or regularity, which was nowhere to be found in Nature. An exact repetition of equal parts without variation—or equal division of lines and spaces—became to them an offence, as a violation of the principles and order of Nature. To avoid any such appearance, even when the symmetry and orderly plan on which plants and flowers are constructed, and objects of utility and adaptation to a purpose, enforced a certain regularity, they followed the subtle devices and secret processes observable in Nature, by which the regularity of a skeleton or ground plan is effectually disguised.

I referred generally to these matters in the first chapter, as supplying a key to much of the artistic excellence of the Japanese. But the subject is well worthy of more minute study and careful elaboration, in order to show what those processes in Nature are, from the observation of which the Japanese have, as I believe, derived their cunning in every kind of Art industry, and how naturally the observation of the one has led to the other. The prevalence of order, method,

and design in the constructive processes giving form to the various products of the vegetable kingdom, could not long have escaped such close observers. What they first noticed and admired was, no doubt, the endless variety and constant beauty of Nature's works, with the absence of formality and all appearance of regularity or monotony. Yet behind this apparent freedom and wantonness of growth, they would in time discover that a rigid adherence to an orderly plan of a geometrical character or pattern was one of the conditions of this infinite variety of beautiful forms. Whether they attained to a knowledge that geometrical and arithmetical proportions govern the material universe, and are to be traced as clearly in the graceful flower or stately tree as in the crystallization of minerals, or the orbits of the stars, may be very doubtful. Nor was it needful for their purpose. It was enough for them to discern the existence of a general plan and a fixed order of development amidst all the variety they admired, and to discover how the two could be combined. This must soon have led them to perceive that, although Nature builds up plants and animals each upon a regular plan, she takes infinite pains to disguise such regularity under an appearance of freedom, and has many devices for concealing from the eye the skeleton with all its rigidity of mathematical proportions. When they had advanced thus far they had an endless field before them, rich in every kind of suggestive motives for the perfection of decorative Art; and we see how they have profited by such teaching.

An orderly plan of geometric proportions and definite pattern as a basis—the constant repetition of similar parts in a fixed order of succession with alternation, being given to them as the chief elements of all Nature's exhaustless beauty and variety, the Japanese artist has so well profited by his lessons that, although variety has become the distinguishing character of his work, he never fails in symmetry, though his idea of *what constitutes symmetry*, and the best mode of securing it, is widely different from any that has prevailed, as a general rule, in the Western world.

This is a subject of so much interest, that in order to give it fuller development I must trust to the indulgence of my readers while I offer some considerations drawn rather from the field of physiology and anatomical botany than things more generally associated with the domain of Art. In a posthumous volume of "Miscellanies,"* by the late Dr. John Addington Symonds, of Bristol, published in 1871 by his son, there is a lecture delivered to a Society at Bristol, "On the Principles of Beauty," so full of pregnant truths in connection with Art and the principles which flow from the constitution of man and the structure of the eye and brain, that I could wish it were better known. He seems to have been one of those men who add to a scientific knowledge of the human frame, general culture and love of Art, of which class the medical profession has more than one representative at the present

* See "Miscellanies," article "Principles of Beauty," by Dr. John Addington Symonds, M.D. London : Macmillan & Co. 1871.

day. All who are familiar with the works of Sir Henry Thompson, often to be seen on the walls of the Society of Water Colours, and of the etchings from Nature of Mr. Seymour Haden, which are among the best specimens of modern Art, will recognise the value of such a combination of the two objects of study. I trust the following extracts and *résumé* of some of the facts and conclusions bearing on the subject more immediately under consideration may tend to direct attention to the lecture itself.

Speaking of variety as a source of beauty, as well as of the pleasure derived from similarity, Dr. Symonds remarks that "The delight in new impressions, the sense of change and of action, this is what may be considered the most popular kind of beauty. For the appreciation of symmetry a certain amount of culture is needful, but new colours and unaccustomed forms may at once attract attention, and impart pleasure to the most simple and uneducated minds. Under the operation of agencies which bring such novelties and varieties, the mind has a consciousness of pleasant activity analogous to the enjoyment of muscular exercise. It is this ministration which accounts for most of the pleasure produced by natural scenery, in the ever-changing effects of light and shade and colour, and the endless diversities of form in flowers, shrubs, and trees, and in the animated tribes which people the scenes of beauty. And yet in all these objects it is to be noted, that though variety is a prevailing element, yet there is a large admixture of similarity. The

similarity of the leaves to each other, and the uniformity of their prevailing colour in a tree, are accompanied by a constant change of branches, boughs, and twigs, whatever hidden regularity there may be in the intervals of division and angles of divarication. How these all combine, under a definite order, to give the effect of mere wanton profusion and careless grace, is Nature's secret, in which lies 'the hidden soul of harmony.'"

Again he observes, "In natural objects, where there is the greatest apparent diversity, it is easy to trace the law of uniformity. In foliage there is not only the general likeness of the leaves and branches, but the direction or the relative position of the leaves and branches is in a great measure uniform. There is a sense of symmetry in the midst of all the seeming complexity of parts. So in the grouping of human figures in a picture, where variety of lines and forms is most natural, it will be found that the arrangement is most pleasing to the eye when, without formality, there is a certain degree of symmetry, as when one side of the picture somewhat corresponds to the other without conspicuously balancing it. A parallelism which does not strike the eye, and yet may be traced in the direction of the limbs, the figure of a pyramid, or an ellipse, or a rectangle, by the eye looking for it, though it does not in the least approach to actual definition—such arrangements, by a virtual conformity to symmetry, without any marked appearance of it, give unquestionable pleasure to our sight."

Continuing the analysis, he observes, "The pleasure

derived from similarity enters largely into the beauty of symmetry. This side is like that. This curve corresponds to that. And it is like with a difference, the difference being in place or material (*idem in alio*). Similarity enlivened by difference, variety restrained by unity, may be found in all the arrangements of light and shade, form and colour, and sound, which are most pleasing to the eye and to the ear;" but all sudden and abrupt changes of sensation, as he further explains, are displeasing, and thus *continuity* is an element in agreeable movements of the body as well as in pleasant sensations. "Hence the influence of similarity and variety and continuity may be traced in the beauty which belongs to simple lines, and quite apart from all collateral suggestions ; but still more in a curved line, because that presents both continuity and variety in a manner agreeable to the sensation of sight, and calling forth an agreeable exercise of the muscles of the eye. But some curves are more pleasant than others. The circle is less agreeable than the ellipse, and the simple ellipse than the ovoid or composite ellipse. In the circle there is a constant change of direction, but every change is like its predecessor, and the general appearance is excess of uniformity or monotony. In the ellipse the change of direction is more gradual, and the figure admits of division by the eye without diameters into opposites which are similar and symmetrical. The ovoid is still more beautiful, from the yet greater variety of direction, with perfect facility of gradation. But apart from the course of the line, there is an

impression on the sense by the enclosed space. The circle is always the same in form, however different in size, the radii being equal. The ellipse, on the other hand, is in its nature variable, and is at once recognised as such. It suggests a form which may vary almost indefinitely by the varying proportions between its major and minor axis."

Speaking further of sensational beauty and its sources, he remarks that "The beauty of form may be perceived and delighted in without any knowledge of its source; but there must be a certain organization of the sensorium to this effect. As it is a well-known fact that some persons are insusceptible to the enjoyment of the more complex forms of harmony of sound, so there are subtleties of symmetry beyond the range of ordinary perception. There are individuals who have not the æsthetical constitution which would enable them to recognise and enjoy the exquisite proportions of the Venus of Milos, or the portico of the Parthenon, just as others are dead to the harmonies of Beethoven."

The truth of these observations and their value, as affording an insight into the physiological laws governing our perception of symmetry, and other elements essential to Art, is very striking. I will show farther on, that the Japanese ideas of symmetry, while differing so signally from our own, are entirely in harmony with the methods by which Nature in many instances meets the exigencies of symmetry, by the balance of corresponding, but unequal, and more or less dissimilar parts. But before leaving Dr. Symonds's

suggestive lecture, I must give one more extract. Returning to the effect of variety on the mind and the condition attaching to its full enjoyment, "There is a pleasure," he says, "resulting from the mere novelty of a sensation, but if there is nothing in the impression but its novelty to afford pleasure, the enjoyment soon ceases. Nature, however, is so rich, and Art so fertile, that this source of pleasure never fails, and it meets us under the form of what we call *variety*. Besides variety and *continuity*, there is another circumstance under which sensation gives pleasure, viz. *similarity*. Repetition is agreeable, but mere likeness, *without difference*, becomes distasteful sameness, or dull uniformity; just as mere *variety*, without *likeness*, would be intolerable; for in this case there would be a number of insulated experiences without any connection, and the perception of relations is one of the deepest wants of our nature."

Thus distinctly may we trace, in strict accordance with the principles exemplified in Nature and the physiological laws of our constitution, all the more striking and characteristic elements in Japanese Art. It remains now to show the processes in Nature, more particularly in the growth of plants, by which, out of a few very simple elementary parts, boundless variety and perfect symmetry are secured, with an entire absence of monotony or appearance of formality and regularity—a combination which gives a charm to every landscape and to each individual and component part.

Repetition of like parts—but likeness with a difference—and change or variety, with a certain continuity,

we thus see are essential elements in Nature's inexhaustible power of charming with novelty. But behind this there is yet another secret, and that is the care with which the geometric proportions and regularity of plan on which trees and plants, and flowers of every kind, are built up, is concealed. To this concealment of an orderly plan Japanese Art, like Nature, is indebted mainly for its attraction. Nature never repeats herself. However multitudinous her creations, they are never absolutely and precisely alike. No two trees or flowers, not even two leaves of the same, are without a difference, however small. The Japanese artist, at a very early period, seems to have seized upon this great characteristic, and adopted it for his guiding principle. But this residuary element of variety was only the last of a series of effects and processes leading up to it. Mere repetition of similar forms would obviously not suffice. There must be some further secret of arrangement, method of growth, or combination of parts, to secure not only a pleasing variety, but the grace, the harmony, and unfailing beauty of the vegetable and floral kingdom. The foliage of a tree and the petals of a flower, however confused and complex to the eye, have each a regulated place and order, and the beauty and grace of the whole are essentially dependent upon this order being rigorously adhered to. Nothing looks so remote from this as the aspect of Nature, in whatever direction we turn our gaze throughout the universe. The stars which seem to powder the vault above, as though scattered broadcast like dust from the hand, have all their place, and the

orbits of the planets are fixed with such geometrical proportions and mathematical nicety that astronomers can calculate their distances and respective influences, even to the small aberrations permitted within their fixed order. As in the heavens, so on the earth. Everywhere law exists—not its absence, which is disorder and license. Order, method, and design prevail—not chance, or the negation of any of these conditions.

These things, so obvious to us and unquestionable at the present time, have not in all ages been discerned or accepted as fundamental truths; while the actual processes by which such laws were made operative must, to a great degree, have been hidden until quite lately. Those processes by which the human frame is built up and its growth regulated, by which plants and flowers are developed from the seed, the stem, and the leaf, were a closed book until anatomy and physiology traced them out. Without such help, however, it would appear that the Japanese, moved by a great love of Nature and of Art, must have gone far to divine, if not to see clearly, the secret of Nature's inexhaustible variety and beauty. Desiring to exercise their imitative and creative faculties in reproducing similar effects, in a form less evanescent, and in objects adapted for use in all the offices and occupations of daily life, they went to Nature and her school for the needful instruction.

The method by which in the floral world the orderly plan of growth and construction is maintained, and yet so disguised and effectually hid, as a rule, that only a patient scrutiny and dissection of all the parts of a

plant could lay them bare, would naturally be the first object of research. And this once mastered, little would remain but to apply the fruitful knowledge thus obtained at the source. Probably it might not be immediately obvious that the mere imitation of what was found in Nature would not suffice. As with the Egyptians in adopting for decorative purposes the lotus, with the Greeks the anthemion, and with the Romans the acanthus, a conventional adaptation was needed to create a decorative effect. In a word, as Mr. Fergusson so well expresses it in his last great work on "Architecture in all Countries,"—"we ought always to copy the processes and never the forms of Nature."* And so, in applying the subtle devices by which any formality in flowers and plants is hid, all the Japanese had to do was to apply the principle, and not to copy too closely the actual forms. Mere imitation does not constitute Art, however perfect. There must be mind and invention, which is a product of mind, combined with artistic power of reproducing natural objects and accurately copying them, to make a work of Art.

Believing that the extent to which Japanese Art is indebted for its charm to these successful applications of Nature's processes, designed to hide the existence of an orderly plan, has not hitherto been recognised, I wish to show how Nature proceeds to effect the purpose which the Japanese, in imitation, have so lovingly and persistently kept before them, and made their governing

* See "History of Architecture in all Countries," chapter xii., "Imitation of Nature."

principle. It is only by this analytic course that it is possible to demonstrate the principles which underlie the excellence attained in Japan. In a very able notice which appeared some months ago of Messrs. Audsley and Bowes's work on the "Keramic Art of Japan," there is a remark well worthy of note for its truth, and the keen insight it shows in a matter so little understood. Speaking of the Japanese artist's delight in simple Nature, and his fine understanding of the beauty of leaf and flower, the critic remarks, "The most conventional elements in his system of decoration are founded upon intimate knowledge of Nature and of its ways of growth. It is not merely that individual objects are correctly rendered, but that they are disposed upon a principle of freedom and irregularity which is sympathetically imitative of the principle of Nature. The very order of his decoration is inspired by a regard for the disorder of the outward world. This is the secret of much in Japanese design that seems at first merely the result of eccentricity and of a perverse desire to be original. If a Japanese artist has a space given him to adorn, he does not necessarily seek out the centre and place his ornament there; for, although that would be the obvious means of securing proportion, it would not satisfy a taste directly derived from a study of Nature, where proportion is rather suggested than actually expressed. We find, therefore, that the Japanese artist, imitating the ways of Nature, throws his design a little out of the precise balance, and trusts to the spectator to judge of the result by an association of impressions

similarly derived. This is only a simple and very obvious example, but it touches an essential element in the scheme of Japanese decoration. It is, of course, true that all great artists of every school have been conscious of this quality in Nature, and of its value in Art, but the part that it plays in the system of Japanese design is that of established tradition." This is much in the sense of my own observations, and the general purport of this chapter more especially, but it is so admirably expressed that I am glad to quote the exact words of such a discriminating critic.

In the following chapter I will give some illustrations drawn from plants and flowers which may help to elucidate the principles here described more clearly than they can be done by words alone. I would only further notice here a remark made of Palissy that he generally copied from subjects near at hand, especially fish, frogs, lizards, shells, and plants found in the vicinity of his residence, which was Paris. And to this practice (so exactly in accordance with the habits of the Japanese) has been attributed much of the distinctive character and excellence of his faience.



CHAPTER III.

SYMMETRY IN PLANTS AND FLOWERS, HOW PRODUCED
—NOT INCOMPATIBLE WITH VARIETY AND THE
GROUPING OF UNEQUAL DIVISIONS AND DISSIMILAR
PARTS.

A SERIES of articles appeared in the *Art Journal* during the years 1857-8, under the title of "Botany as adapted to the Arts and Art Manufacture," from the pen of Dr. Christopher Dresser, sometime Lecturer on Botany in the Department of Science and Art at South Kensington, and subsequently reproduced in a book (now out of print) entitled "The Art of Decorative Design."* As these original sources are not readily accessible now, I have no hesitation in giving, with the author's permission, a few of the more striking and important illustrations he supplied, and a summary of his views, in order that I may more easily point out in what way the principles on which the forms of plants and flowers are determined, bear on the progress and development of Japanese Art. Dr. Dresser was an enthusiastic admirer and a close

* See also "Unity in Variety as deduced from the Vegetable Kingdom," by Christopher Dresser (London, James S. Virtue, 1859); and "Principles of Decorative Design," by the same Author (Cassell, Petter, and Galpin).

student of the various objects in the Japan Court of the Exhibition of 1862, and many references will be found in his works to the principles of Japanese decorative Art, to which his attention was then first drawn. He has recently spent many months in Japan, for the purpose of studying in the country all the different Art industries and the processes employed in the production of works having any artistic character; and on his return he gave a very instructive lecture on the subject at the Society of Arts. It is to be hoped he will publish a separate work on "The Art Manufactures of Japan," which no one is so competent, from previous study, to make both instructive and exhaustive.

If we turn now to examples furnished in flowers of symmetry attained by the grouping of dissimilar parts and unequal divisions—a certain balance of corresponding but unlike parts—the family of orchids, with all their quaint and fantastic developments, abound in striking illustrations of the principle. The *Odentata glossum Insleayi* affords a good example of this inequality and dissimilarity, both in the tiger-like markings and in the number and form of the component parts of the flower (see p. 50, Fig. 13).* The petals are two, and marked on each side with *unequal lines and spots*; the sepals are three, also unequally striped and spotted; and the lip forms a fourth unit, all arranged in a circle round the columns, carpels, &c., in the centre, which are of

* The same principle is well illustrated in the flower of the Rhododendron with its five petals, one only with a yellowish centre and spots, occasionally repeated in part on a second, as if to break the uniformity.

a bright golden hue, while the other parts are tinted yellow and brown. The symmetry is preserved by a certain balance of unequal and dissimilar parts in odd numbers.

Although Nature generally works on a fixed principle of development by which the two halves of a leaf are exactly the same, yet even in this there is occasionally

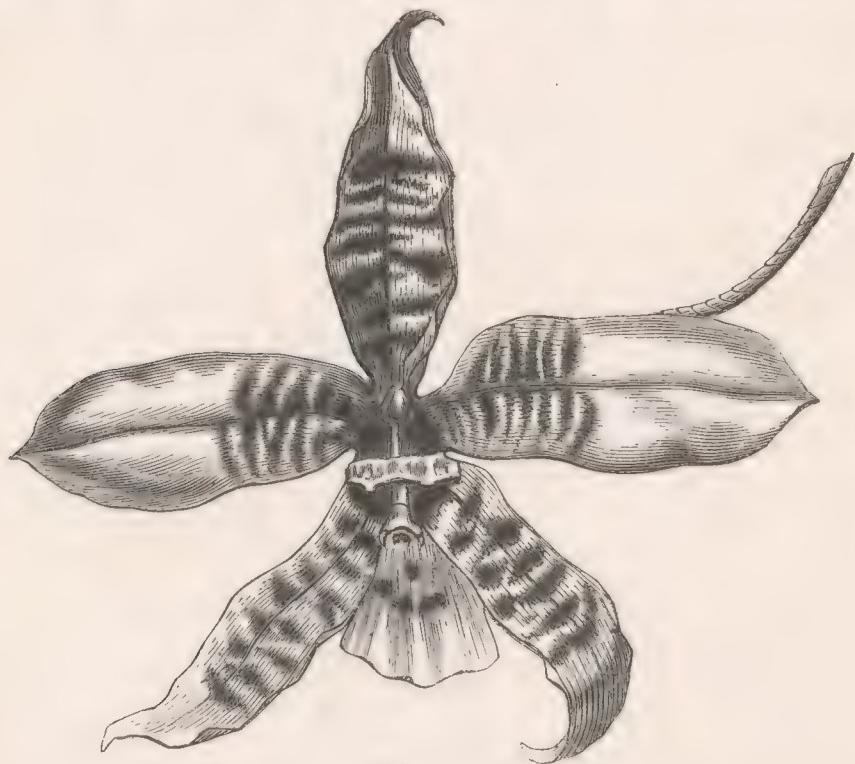


Fig. 13.

a notable departure, as in the Begonia (Fig. 14). Here the symmetry of the leaf is lost, but that of the whole plant is secured by the disposition of the leaves on the axis, so that the want of correspondence in the two halves of each single leaf is compensated by opposing the lesser halves of the leaves to each other.

The most common formation of flowers, however, is that in which each is composed of a series of rings of

parts, each ring, or “whorl,” of parts being formed of units which are precisely similar.

Thus in Fig. 15 there are five precisely similar lobes forming the outer ring, five yellow leaves precisely alike forming the next whorl, ten awl-shaped members surmounted with knobs forming the third ring, and five central parts (carpels) constituting the pistil.

But that we may understand how unessential it is to

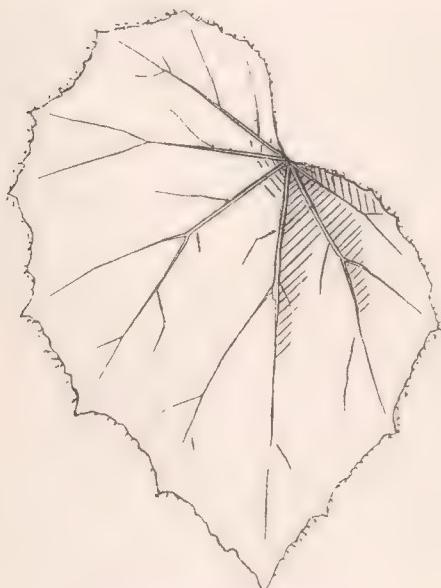


Fig. 14.—Begonia.

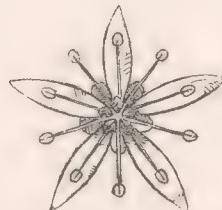


Fig. 15.—Stonecrop.

symmetry that the units of each whorl should, as in this case and the great majority of flowers, be precisely similar, and have their halves also alike, let us take the example of the periwinkle, where the halves of the members are unequal, but all pointing one way, and it will be seen that the symmetrical effect is equally obtained (Fig. 16). Here we see the flower-leaves (petals) have none of them equal halves, for they are all unequal.

So in the pansy, we find two halves only are alike, but there is no loss of symmetry, as the halves are similar; it only demands a peculiar position to secure this end and make a pleasing variety (Fig. 17).

As regards symmetry, therefore, it is obvious that even Lindley's elastic definition can scarcely be stretched wide enough to embrace all the modes by which Nature secures the end. He says, "Symmetry may be defined to be the general correspondence of one half of a given object with the other half in structure or other per-

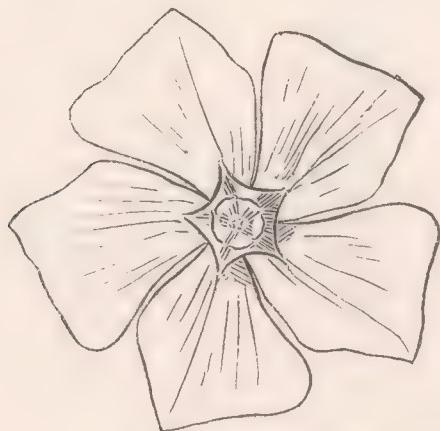


Fig. 16.—Periwinkle.

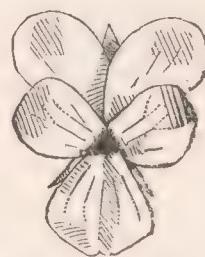


Fig. 17.—Pansy.

ceptible circumstance." In regard to the simplicity of the means by which seemingly great complexity and infinite variety are produced, the principles that govern all development are easily traced, and may be reduced to their elements, which scarcely exceed two or three in number. It is an axiom in botany that "whatever is the arrangement of the leaves, such is the arrangement of the branches;" for the branch is always the product of the bud, and a *regular* bud is always generated in and developed from the axil of a leaf, or the

angle formed by its union with the stem or axis. This reveals the principle on which Nature produces her more complex structures. It is merely a system of repetition, and may be carried to any extent. The complexity is only in appearance and extent, *for the unit is invariably more or less simple and uniform, as well as the method of its repetition.* We may not, however, entirely overlook another principle of almost universal application, in which a new factor in the form of *Number* comes into play. Whatever may be the number of parts in one floral whorl, it is a rule of the vegetable kingdom that such shall either be the number in the other whorls, or some power (multiple) of that number. Thus in the stonecrop (Fig. 15) the outer whorl is composed of five parts, the next of five, the next of ten (or twice five), and the inner again of five.

The Japanese would see that a flower is made up of four series of parts: a ring of outer leaves, which are usually green; a ring of coloured leaves; a number of awl-shaped or threadlike members, terminated in knobs, which are usually yellow; and a central organ consisting of several portions. In the arrangement of these parts is set forth the principle of *Alternation*,—for the members of the second series do not fall over the parts of the first series (the petals do not fall over the sepals), but fall over the spaces between them—they alternate with them, and serve to conceal the originating points and their regularity of succession. The parts of the third series do not fall over the constituent members of the second, but between them—they alternate with

them; and so with the inner series, the same rule is acted upon, and in its application is productive of endless variety, and that intricacy of form which Hogarth eulogizes as "leading the eye in a wanton kind of chase," the secret charm of which is never to see in these outward manifestations of beauty the *causa*

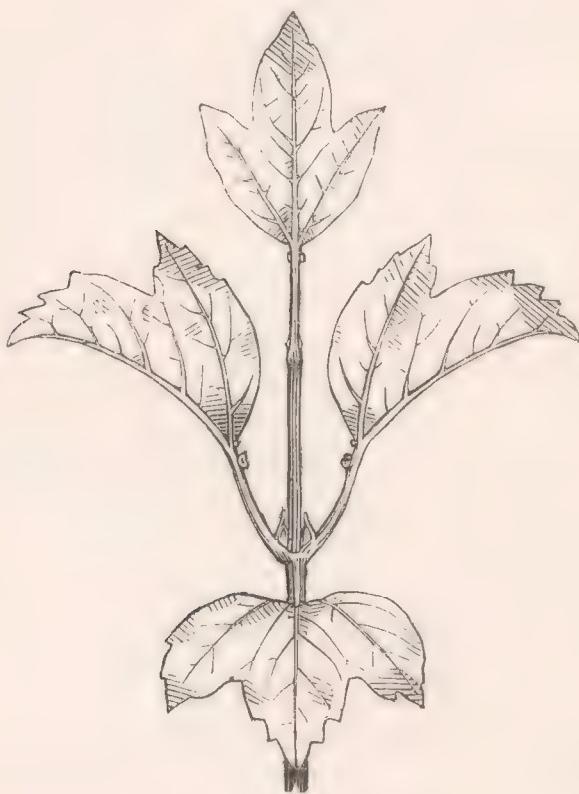


Fig. 18.—Guelder Rose.

causarum of so much variety—the law of development, the principle of order, the regularity of succession on a geometrical basis. A methodical arrangement, though so invariably followed, is carefully concealed by what is seemingly confused, and without any trace of regularity or rigid rule. Freedom indeed seems the rule, and not order. But a cursory glance at the guelder rose

(Fig. 18) will show that the leaves are arranged upon the stem in an orderly manner, that they grow in pairs, which are so placed that when we look upon the top of the branch the leaves are seen to be in four rows (Fig. 19). Here two leaves are opposed to each other, one of which passes to the right and one to the left; then one of the next pair advances and one recedes; one of the next pair again passes to the right and one to

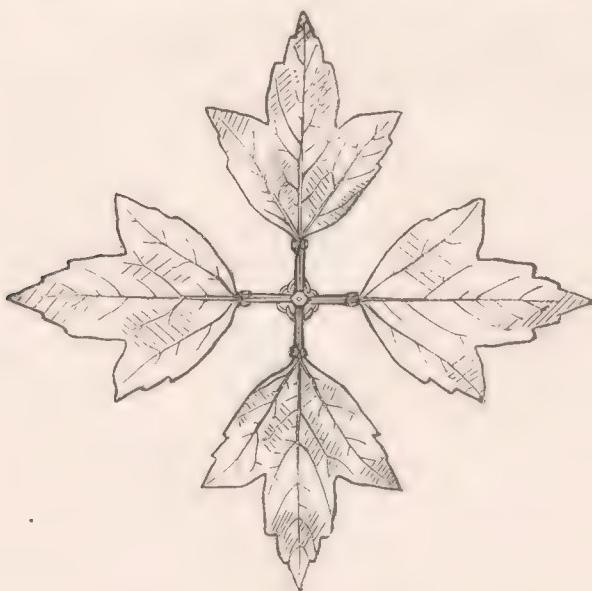


Fig. 19.—Guelder Rose.

the left; and so on through the entire length of the branch. This is not an uncommon mode of leaf arrangement. In some instances leaves which are not arranged in an opposite or whorled manner, and which were long regarded as being without order in their disposition, so well had it been disguised, were discovered by Bonnet to have a spiral disposition, and were so placed that a thread wound in a corkscrew-like manner around the stem touched the base of

every leaf; and this spiral leaf arrangement occurs in a number of modifications which become more and more complicated in character. But all may be traced to the same principle, and have their origin (or more simple development) in those instances in which the leaves are alternately at either side of the stem, and one only proceeds from the stem at the same level, as they are consecutively higher. This is the simplest form, or the

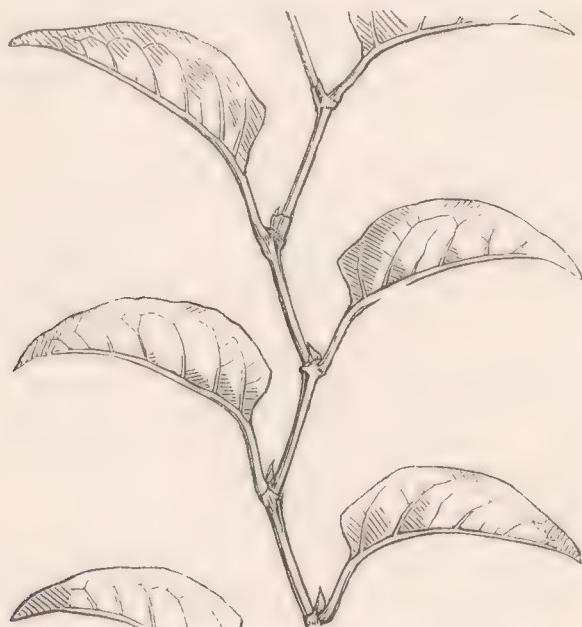


Fig. 20.—*Polygonum cuspidatum* : Lime-tree.

first of a series, which successively become more and more complex. In the lime-tree we no longer find two or more leaves originating in one transverse plane, but the leaves are protruded solitary at intervals, one at one side and the other at the other alternately (Fig. 20). The diagram Fig. 21 shows the process.

Fig. 22 shows the more complex spiral arrangement of the *Colchicum autumnale*, where one revolution in the

spiral thread encounters three leaves, the fourth, or first of the next cycle, being over the first, as diagrammatically delineated. One secret of the infinite diversity produced under this arrangement consists in the variation in different plants of the distance between each leaf on the stems. "In some the consecutive leaves are equi-distant; that is, leaf two will be removed from leaf one by half the circumference of the stem.

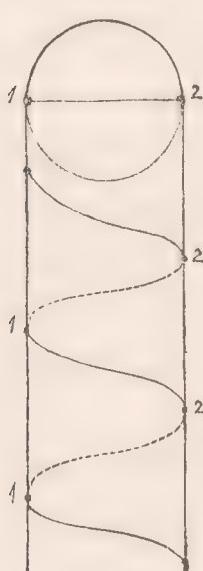


Fig. 21.

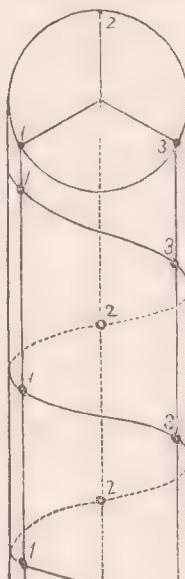


Fig. 22.

The sugar-cane, leek, and daily lily, and most grasses, are illustrations of this mode of arrangement. In another spiral arrangement, as the autumn crocus, the leaves are removed from one another by one-third of the circumference of the stem. In another the leaves are in five rows, and the consecutive leaves in the spiral series are two-fifths of the circumference of the stem apart; this being the case, the spiral thread passes twice round the stem before reaching a leaf situated over the

first, while in the instance before given, a leaf so situated was arrived at by making one circuit round the stem. This disposition seems very common, being met with in the rose, apple, pear, cherry, and many others, including the poplar and the oak." In some, as in the holly and plantain, "the spiral series are three-eighths of the circumference of the stem apart, and the spiral thread has to pass three times round the stem before encountering a leaf situated over that with which we start; while in the house-leek, minor convolvulus, and wormwood, the leaves are disposed in thirteen rows, and the consecutive leaves are removed from one another by five-thirteenths of the circumference of the circle, so that it is necessary to follow the spiral thread five times round the stem for the next leaf situated over the one from which we start." This is called the elongated repetition, as distinguished from the principle of radiating repetition common in flowers. In these latter there is an organ formed of one or two members repeated in a circular arrangement. But to show the infinite devices by which variety is secured, however simple the elementary forms or rigid the geometrical basis, we find that radiating repetition not only occurs in the case of flowers, but is seen in the top view of every branch. Thus a side view gives elongated repetition, and a top view radiating repetition (see Figs. 18 and 19, pp. 54, 55).

Whatever is the arrangement of branches and leaves, such also is the disposition of flowers and of the floral parts, all equally subject to one orderly principle of

development. Indeed, as Dr. Dresser demonstrates, "all parts are thus protruded in fixed stations, for the only two typical organs of the plant are the leaf and stem; and these in their modifications gave rise to all the members of the vegetable structure." And so we get the revelation of the fact, that amidst all the endless variety and beauty in the vegetable world, which seems to carry with it the most perfect freedom from all rigid rules and geometric lines or mathematical proportions, a principle of order everywhere prevails, in the least as in the greatest; and that plants, whatever their appearance or development, are founded on a geometrical basis, or system, as certainly as the motions of the stars and the celestial spheres.

We now see not only how repetition and alternation are principles of plant growth, but manifestly the sources of much of the pleasure we derive from the vegetable and floral world. The true artist seeks from the simple elements of natural beauty to follow Nature's lines, and reproduce new combinations upon some elementary principles for the delight of mankind. So, at least it seems to me, the Japanese have ever proceeded in their artistic development and its decorative tendencies, and with no mediocre success. If, as can clearly be shown, repetition with variation—the chief element of which is alternation of similar forms and colours in a certain order of contrast and succession—lie at the root of all beautiful combinations in the vegetable kingdom, we see at once how unlimited a field for study in decorative Art, Nature supplies when in

her least lavish moods. In radiated or elongated repetition of leaves and petals of flowers, or of a spot or stripe of colours, we may trace the original of all the best and choicest ornaments which have found acceptance in different ages. This repetition of the spot has given rise to a class of patterns termed powdering, and when combined with order, it has its most simple form in the repetition of a geometric basis of a dot. This repetition with variation, so constant in Nature, has appeared in every style of ornamentation which has come down to us from ancient times, and the chief merit of the Japanese will be found in the more perfect application of the principle, and the nearer approach they have made to the Great Exemplar, in the richness of the collected products, and the felicitous, if not unerring, instinct with which they have drawn from Nature her best lessons.

It would be foreign to the object and scope of this article to enter upon any consideration of the more abstract questions connected with the subtlety or strength which may be the properties of different lines or curves. Hogarth's line of beauty, or a line of life as indicative of vigour and vitality, and the curves used by the Greeks as most in accordance with their own sense of beauty, and giving the best expression of refinement in form, suggest matter for endless discussion. The Greeks appear to have adopted many curves, from the parabolic to the elliptic, and the cultivated eye feels that curves are least satisfactory which have their halves alike. In Nature these are rarely seen. Dr.

Dresser believes that with curves, refinement rests in subtlety, for that line, the constructive origin of which it is most difficult to detect, is found to be the most beautiful. Thus he says, “An arc is the least beautiful of curves, for its origin is instantly detected. A portion of the bounding line of an ellipse is more beautiful, for its origin is less apparent—it being struck from two centres. The curve which bounds the egg-shape is more subtle still, because it is struck from three centres ; and so, in ratio to the number of centres employed in the construction, and its consequent subtlety, is the effect enhanced.”

Now, of all curves affected by the Japanese, I think that which bounds the egg-shape is their predilection. Given then the selection by instinct of one of the higher and more subtle of curves, and the adoption of the fruitful principle of repetition and alternation as the conditions of variety and beauty, the Japanese seem to have very early fallen upon the most essential elements of decorative Art in its best form. The discovery of this principle of alternation and repetition for ornamental purposes, whether in Nature or Art, was, of course, not confined to the Japanese. The Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Hindoos, all have shown in their decorations how well they understood its value. The echinos, or egg-and-tongue mouldings of the Romans (Fig. 23, p. 62), is an example in point. It consists of ovi-form centres arranged in a horizontal series, with tongues or arrow-heads between, and alternating with them.

But Nature is not content with alternation and repe-

tition for the production of variety and the highest beauty. There are a certain coyness and artifice in the way in which she conceals the method, and by the device adds a new charm. It is in this direction that it has seemed to me the Japanese have shown a subtlety of tact and truly Oriental patience in extracting the last secret of Nature's ingenuity wherewith to enrich the work of their hand. Alternation is only one of Nature's resources by which provision is made for endless variety and beauty in perfect combination. "A confluence of lines where leaves are given off from branches, and branches from stems, is continual;" but a close observation shows that this branching is con-

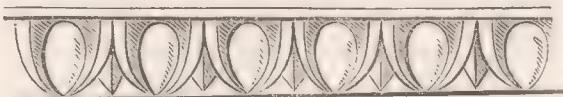


Fig. 23.

cealed by the foliage during the summer months, in which period alone plants present themselves in an ornamental aspect; and while the leaves are given out in countless numbers, the means devised for calling attention from the union of the leaf-stalk with the stem are many. For instance, the bud arises in the angle formed by the upper surface of the leaf-stalk and the stem, and thus acts as the alternating members do, in the examples already adduced. The alternation itself, which seems to be designed as a means of calling attention from a union of lines in all cases unsatisfactory, is here further strengthened and supplemented by a device full of grace. "A special provision for

so arresting the attention that it shall not fix upon this confluence of lines is also made, for a pair of small leafy or membranous organs (stipules), of a form rich in subtle beauty, conceal this juncture" and the point of weakness. Fig. 24, taken from the hawthorn, shows this well in the lower stipule. The growth of special organs is substituted for the principle of alternation,

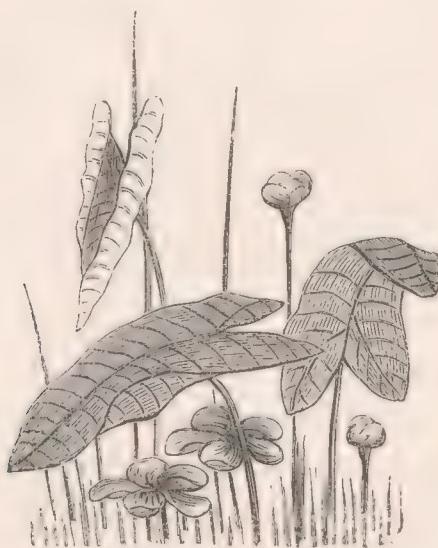


Fig. 24.—Hawthorn.

and Nature with one effort secures many ends, while man, in his ignorance and feebleness, is reduced to seek, by many converging means, to attain a single object.

It is thus the forms of plants and all the parts of a plant are invariably in harmony with the circumstances in which they exist. Thus adaptation and fitness should form one of the objects of an artist's closest study. The trees which grow on high and exposed positions,

and the plants destined to flourish on the unsheltered plain, have long and narrow rigid leaves, which best enable them to bear the fury of the tempest; the stems, by their strength, combined with elasticity, show a similar adaptation. Now in all these particulars the Japanese are close observers, and this gives a special charm to many of their slightest works with brush or chisel. If they desire to represent the action of wind, not only the dresses of their figures will convey the impression to the mind, but the grass and flowers with their slender stems will be turned by the wind, bending to the storm. All this minuteness of observation tends to create excellence in decorative Art; and I cannot doubt that this patience and minuteness of observation in the study of the vegetable and animal world, both characteristic of the Japanese, have suggested to them the utmost regard to *fitness* and *perfect adaptation*, which constitutes another of their great virtues.



CHAPTER IV.

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF JAPANESE ART, CONTINUED—ITS ORIGINALITY.

HAVING now passed in review two of the most characteristic features of Japanese Art, decorative and industrial, traceable to a passion for variety and to ideas of symmetry, in accord with what they observed in Nature, we may proceed to consider their claim to have founded a school of Art different from all others, and essentially original in conception and artistic development.

How far they may have borrowed from other nations, or been indebted to foreign sources for the attractiveness and excellence of their designs and Art industries generally, is a question of considerable interest. Every collector of Chinese and Japanese bronzes, and other artistic works of both countries, must often have been struck by the similarity to be observed in many specimens with Egyptian, Greek, Etruscan, Assyrian, and Indian types.

This subject is one of some moment, if we seek to determine the place of the Japanese among nations distinguished by a great development of the Art faculty. In this attempt we shall do well to bear in mind what

Mr. John Leighton has so well remarked, that “an outline or diagram may exhibit the highest Art without any pictorial effect, as, for example, the outlines of Flaxman, which are not pictures, because they lack pictorial effects. Yet were they added, they might become pictures, while ranking lower as works of Art. On the other hand, the marvellous dabs and sweeps of a brush without an outline, often seen in common Japanese designs, must be held to show great dormant pictorial powers.” “But whatever may be the speciality of Japanese Art,” he also observes, “we must not fall into the error of putting it all in one class. It has great variety, even to a limited power of light and shade, with much of silhouette in it.” Of this I could hardly find a better specimen than in Fig. 25. It represents a night scene in Theatre Street at Yeddo, or Tokio, as the capital is now called. The dark indigo blue of the sky, in which a full moon appears, and the red light from the open windows, as well as the party-coloured groups of people in the street, are full of picturesque details, standing well out on the pale grey ground of the street, while the perspective is well preserved.

It has been rather assumed, on a superficial view, that the Japanese are tributaries to the Chinese for their Art, as we know they are for their ideographic written characters; as the Romans were debtors to the Greeks for their best inspirations in the domain of Art. But though Buddhism may be certainly proved to have been received by the Japanese from China or Corea

—and it is not here material which—about the middle

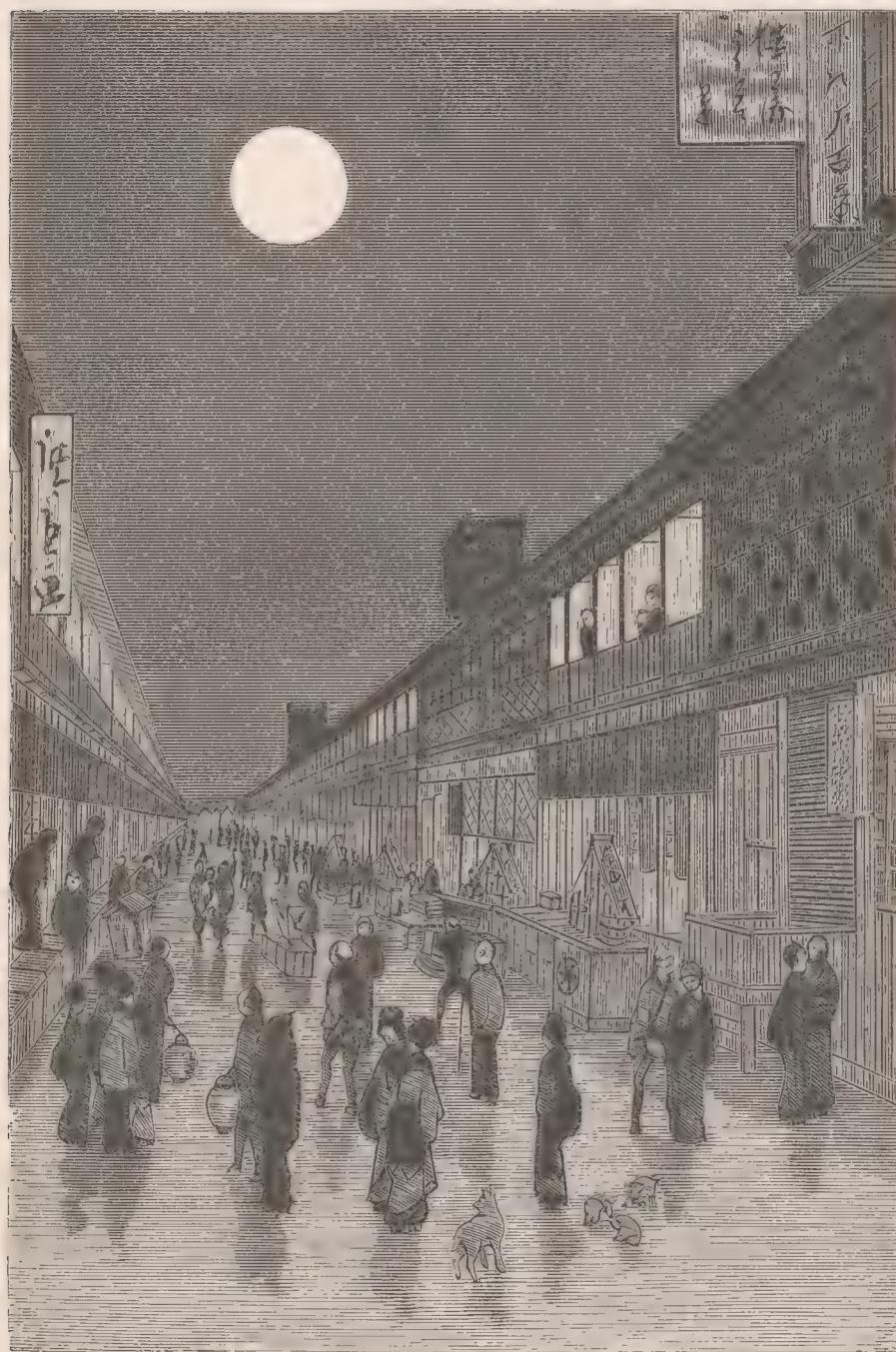


Fig. 25.

of the fifth century, and with it apparently the litera-

ture, philosophy, and written language of their more advanced neighbour, it does not follow that they borrowed their Art motives, or that æsthetic taste for which they have been so long distinguished, from the same source. Although the decorative and industrial arts of China and Japan are closely related, they are sufficiently distinctive not to be easily mistaken by those who are conversant with both. There must, however, have been, from a remote era, some mutual interchange of ideas and products. These, it is true, were not always of an amicable kind, Japan having often ravaged the Chinese coasts, while China twice fitted up great armadas for the conquest of the combative little kingdom of islands,—yet still they trafficked and visited. The national development of the two races both in Polity and Art has notwithstanding been very different. Their features and physique are not more unlike than their speech, traditions, and habits of thought. Japan, until the forcible intrusion of foreign nations in 1852, when the Americans by moral persuasion, backed by ships and guns, negotiated their first treaty, was the perfect embodiment of feudalism with a dual government, carrying the mind back to the days in France when Merovingian sovereigns reigned, and Mayors of the Palace governed the realm, with its great feudatories, often at war with each other and their suzerain, and holding fiefs on military tenure with seignorial rights and hereditary rank. The Chinese Empire, on the other hand, in a more or less united state, has existed for the last two thousand years with-

out a trace of feudalism or hereditary titles and rank beyond the circle of the Imperial blood. A pure despotism of autocratic character, with pretensions to divine descent on the part of the ruling sovereign. At that point alone the two governing systems touch, and the countries have been in most other respects as far as the poles asunder, in all that constitutes any likeness, physical, moral, or political. It does not follow, therefore, that these two nations, so near in space, and yet so far apart in their national institutions, polity, and habits of thought, should have a similar æsthetic history, or develop the same character of Art. Siebold's opinion that "the Hindoos and Chinese became for the Japanese what the Greeks and Romans were for the west of Europe—the promoters of language, letters, arts, sciences, religion, and politics"—is true only in a very limited sense. The same remark would apply to the Coreans, although of them and their country or history we know comparatively little, not enough certainly to enable us to draw any safe conclusions. We have always considered them as a semi-barbarous people forming a tributary and outlying dependency of China, and far beneath their overshadowing superior in all that constitutes civilisation. What little acquaintance I had yearly at Peking, during my residence there, with the Corean ambassadors or tribute-bearers and their suite, tended to confirm this view. In outward appearance and habits the Coreans seemed more akin to the Mongol tribes than to the Chinese.

According to Dr. Geertz of Nagasaki, who read some time ago an interesting paper to the Asiatic Society of Japan on the "Useful Minerals and Metallurgy of the Japanese," the knowledge possessed by the latter of mineralogy and metallurgy was to be traced to the Chinese. He contends that the civilisation of the Chinese is at least two thousand years older than that of the Japanese. Whether this may be accepted as a fact or not, there can be no reasonable doubt, I think, that their intercourse with both Chinese and Coreans materially influenced the progress made in the industrial Arts by the Japanese, as well as the scientific, philosophical, and religious systems adopted by them at a comparatively recent period.

Evidence adduced that the Chinese, two centuries before the Christian era, considered the Japanese to be mere savages proves very little; for the majority of Chinese to this day, even the educated classes—the "literati and gentry," of whom we hear so much as the inciters of mob-violence against foreigners and missionaries—consider all of European race to be "outside barbarians," "foreign devils," ignorant alike of the first principles of law and order, and the teachings of Confucius! It is more to the point that Prince Osogi, a son of a Corean king, according to some ancient Japanese records, in A.D. 284, brought the first knowledge of Chinese literature to Japan. And in the following year a Chinese philosopher, whose name is treasured in the National Archives at *Wang-schin* (called in Japanese, *Wa-ni*), was sent to teach the Chinese

language in Japan. The culture of silk was also first introduced into Japan by the Chinese colonists a century later. But it was chiefly after the introduction of the Buddhist religion, A.D. 463, from Corea, by the priests, joined by numerous artisans, physicians, and artists, according to the Japanese chronicles, that the earliest culture seems to have taken place. If we may believe the authorities quoted, it was a Corean priest, *Tautsching*, who first introduced the manufacture of paper and ink into Japan, previously to which the Japanese had written on silk or hemp tissue, with a camel-hair pencil, as they do to this day for ornamental purposes.

But whatever may have been the interchange of thought and industrial Arts or produce, there has always been something in the genius of the Japanese which has asserted itself, and enabled them to preserve a distinctive character in all their works. This may be seen even when the same motive, or model, can be traced as common to both;—they imitated each other to a certain extent, but always with a difference distinctive of the two races.

Originality, in the sense of absolute independence of borrowed thought or suggestion, neither can claim. Nor is this limited to the three nations occupying the eastern half of Asia — Chinese, Coreans, and Japanese. There has always been, from the days of the Romans, and probably much anterior to the foundation of Rome, communication with the West, across the whole breadth of Asia, by means of trading caravans, migrating nomad tribes, or conquering hosts.

Marco Polo and his uncles, in the thirteenth century, had long been preceded to the farthest East by Nestorians and Jews, authentic relics still existing to testify the fact of their advent and localisation in various places. Were other evidence wanting, it would be found in the Etruscan, Greek, Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Babylonian, and Hindoo types recognisable in the bronzes, the pottery, and decorative designs both of China and Japan, of which the key pattern or Greek border is perhaps the most familiar example.* There has, however, been, in my opinion, an indigenous Art, as well as civilisation, in each country widely different from each other and that of any other nation at similar periods,—only to be explained by moral and intellectual diversities in organization and temperament.

The long and nearly complete isolation of Japan, and the cessation of all intercourse with other nations after the first direct communications with Europeans in the middle of the sixteenth century, must have greatly tended, in subsequent periods, to foster a native growth and development, free from all foreign or “extra-territorial” admixture.

However modified by external influences, ancestral blood and race are continually asserting their original

* Messrs. Audsley and Bowes, in their “Keramic Art of Japan,” give a plate showing the nearest approach to the ordinary Greek fret they have seen in Japanese Art. But the true Greek, or key pattern, is common enough in Japan, and a Japanese wall-paper, exactly reproducing it, was among the specimens in the Japan Court of the Exhibition in 1862. When they depart from it, as they often do, it is in accordance with their constant tendency to vary, and their dislike to servile copying.

characteristics, and reappearing in hereditary lines of thought and action. It is with races as with families, where we constantly see a type of some special kind—physical, mental, or moral—reproduced in its pristine vigour, and all that is most distinctive, where a long descent can be traced from some common ancestor. This may be true, I think, of the æsthetic faculty, as of other gifts or characteristics of a race, and no one can study with any care the Art development of the Japanese without the conviction that whatever they may owe, directly or indirectly, to foreign sources, the influence has been of a transitory kind only, and without any permanent or material effect on the final outcome. It may be true, as has been said, that all nations possess similar fables and proverbs, which are but variations from one common original. Yet it must not the less be admitted that in Art more especially, as Mr. Jarves observes, “on the common warp a wondrously diversified woof has been produced among the races of men.” And in Japan, whether the original stock came in the first instance from Tartary, as seems most probable, or from Babel at the dispersion, as Kæmpfer believed,—or only straight from the coast of China, as Thunberg contends,—it is certain they have developed a strong individuality, unlike that of the Chinese, or any other of the Asiatic families. It is in strict accordance with this that no school of Art in the world is more distinctly stamped with a national *cachet*, distinguishing it from all others. None, perhaps, is so perfect in its technical expression and con-

ventional idealization,—but that, so far as it extends, is only a question of degree; and that it should be original, in the sense of absolute freedom from foreign suggestion or design, I have shown to be impossible. Through the Buddhist religion the Japanese must have had imported a whole series of Indian images and ideas, more or less artistic; and, through India, Byzantine, Greek, Roman, and Persian images and conventional forms may also have been received. That the Japanese like the Chinese, therefore, received much of their decorative Art, with their religion, from India, some of which was Greek in origin, is almost a matter of demonstration. Nevertheless, with the strong national character of the Japanese, all Art suggestions and materials must have been received under such exceptional circumstances of subsequent isolation during many centuries, that any trace of foreign elements might be easily lost in a process of assimilation, or otherwise overlaid and modified by special features of originality.

In so far as the Japanese are concerned, there can be little doubt that as the Buddhistic sculptures were directly influenced by Greek Art, so in the temples of Japan and the more highly decorated topes or shrines, we have Japanese Art developed under the religious and artistic influences of Buddhism. The death of Gautama, the founder of Buddhism in India, is supposed to have taken place B.C. 543. The invasion of the Punjab by Alexander occurred B.C. 327, when Greek models and artistic designs must have been widely spread. But the religion of Buddha was not firmly established

in India until Asoka appeared, in the third century B.C., and first put up sculptured stones, after which the religion and practice together continued to prevail in the Indian peninsula until the sixth and seventh centuries after Christ. And although the Greeks were expelled from the Punjab B.C. 316, after a very brief sojourn, the Greek dynasty founded by Seleucus continued to reign in Bactria from B.C. 326 to 126. Apart from this history of direct intercourse between the Greeks and Hindoos, as well as the populations of Central Asia, it is certain that India had been known to the nations on the Mediterranean shores from time immemorial. Whether the Hindoos were the originals of the "blameless Ethiopians" of Homer, as Dr. Birdwood has suggested, in a letter which appeared some time ago, we need not here discuss. The Greek language, literature, and philosophy followed in the train of Alexander's armies, and with these, of necessity, some tincture of Greek Art, though we have abundant evidence that the seed fell on an ungrateful soil. It has been well remarked by the same writer, that "nowhere does figure sculpture in India (Buddhist or Brahmin) show the indications of an independently developed Art. The Hindoos seem to have no natural feeling for it; they use it, it seems to me, at second hand, and their natural tendency is to subordinate it strictly to architecture." While entirely agreeing with the writer, I quote this more especially because he suggests in the following sentence a curious analogy to the progress of the Japanese in the same direction. He says, "So foreign to the Hindoos is the idea

of figure sculpture in the æsthetic sense, that in the noblest temples the idol is often to be found in some obscene or monstrous symbol.”* The analogy is curiously exact, but it is, if possible, still more perfect in the further development indicated, when it is observed that, “On the other hand, in their decorative work the Hindoos show the greatest originality. It is always pleasing, even in its excesses; while their figure sculpture is never pleasing except when treated conventionally.” The same spontaneity, freedom, and grace so characteristic of the decorative Art of India, is exactly what most distinguishes the work of the Japanese. “Greek influence on Art reached far afield in Asia,” but its adaptation and mode of assimilation by the different races over the breadth of the great continent were curiously diverse. The Græco-Buddhistic sculptures, recently brought to light by Dr. Leitner’s collection of sculptures from the Punjab, and now to be seen in the Indian Museum, show this influence in its most unmistakable form. But when we are struck, as was Mr. James Fergusson, with the Chinese character of the Adjunta Cave (Buddhistic) paintings, and the form of the Sanchi Tope gateways—said to be the oldest sculptures in India, and recalling the gateways of Chinese and Japanese temples—we are at a loss to determine whether these have been borrowed from India, or whether the reverse process may not be the

* This may be overstated; for I did not see in my travels in India any symbols externally “obscene or monstrous,” whatever their origin or meaning may have been. But something of this I have seen in the temples of Japan.

true explanation of a similarity that could scarcely be the result of chance. In view, however, of the early date of many of these sculptured remains of Buddhist caves and temples or topes, going as far back as the second or third century B.C., it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they have all been adopted from India, and are coeval with the introduction of Buddhism, about the origin of which there is no doubt. China and Japan most probably, therefore, as I have said, received some of their decorative Art, with their religion, from India, and through India, it may be also, from Greece—and Byzantium at some later period. How wide or long continued may have been the influence of these Foreign elements in the Japanese mind it is difficult to determine. If we may judge by the ornamentation of their temples, I think it has never ceased. The more recent importations of Art elements from abroad into India show that such influence survives long. That of the Italian artists tempted over to India, by the Mongol Emperors of Delhi, and the mosaic-work of Agra, which takes its origin from the decorations of the Taj by Austin de Bordeaux, is still active throughout Rajpootana to this day. Dr. Birdwood says that we may trace in the decorations of the plaster walls, the floors and the ceilings of nearly every house of any pretensions, the surviving influence of Italian Art.

But there can, I think, be no doubt that many patterns and designs in different parts of the world, very similar in form, owed their first origin to fundamental ideas common to the whole race. This may account for the

artistic treatment of the sacred bean and the lotus, so general in Japan, having been equally common in ancient Egypt.

We have seen that ornamental work in the precious metals, as well as in stone and in wood, was common in a very remote age, by the Mycenæ treasures and other relics lately discovered by Dr. Schliemann. It has been remarked by an able critic that nearly all this rudimentary Art "is based almost throughout upon developments and combinations of the spiral or helix, together with parallel bands and zigzags, the usual elements of primitive ornament. We are constantly struck by the closeness with which some variations approach the Scandinavian interlacings and the Celtic spirals, and even the blending mouldings of adjacent circles in the geometrical Gothic tracery and wheel windows generally." In another direction there is a striking analogy with the Japanese: "Jewellery we find displaying artistic ingenuity and feeling, in strange contrast to the coarse failures of the attempt at representing animal life; the gradual evolution of enriched patterns from simplest elements, reminding us of the progressive elements of the Norman zigzag."

The conclusion to which I am led, therefore, on a review of all the evidences of undoubted communication not only with China, but less directly with India and Central Asia, and through these countries again an acquaintance with the Art motives of Greek and Byzantine work, is rather favourable than otherwise to the claim of originality for Japanese decorative Art. Not

that they had no knowledge whatever of the artistic productions of foreign nations lying too far afield for any direct intercourse, but from the conviction that any knowledge they obtained was too fragmentary to be more than partially influential, even in a suggestive way, and too scanty to afford the materials required for the fundamental principles and development of their Art. This conclusion seems more completely borne out by the wide departure to be observed in all the Japanese Art work from the typical forms and decorative systems of other countries and schools.

If Japanese artists have worked on different principles, and on an independent line, giving for result something totally dissimilar to anything with which we are familiar, or have ever known in the West, it seems only a legitimate inference that the cause is to be sought in the originality of the Japanese mind, and not in elements of exotic growth.

If now it be asked, in what does this originality consist? I believe the question might be sufficiently answered by a reference to the preceding chapters devoted to the consideration of the characteristic features of Japanese Art. These, however, will be supplemented by others, more especially by the next, on Chiaroscuro, Colour, and Perspective, as their knowledge and use of these are exemplified by Japanese work. Whatever can be shown to be really distinctive or essentially characteristic in Japanese Art, must of course constitute a claim to originality. Even though some common principle underlying all Art, or some analogy and a

resemblance more or less faint, could be traced to the artistic work of other countries—and seeing how much there must be in the woof of our common humanity, and in all Art, however developed, that is essentially the same and springing from a common source—I should abate nothing from the estimate here made. But apart from all well-defined and characteristic features, such as I have already enumerated, I think we might logically conclude any Art to be original, which was so far different from all other with which it could be compared, that the first effect of an acquaintance with it was to prompt the artistic workers of every country in the civilised world immediately to attempt to reproduce the chief features in design, colour, or form, and in many cases to make fac-similes, so far as their power enabled them, of the specimens obtained. This has been the common experience of Europe since the year 1862, when the first considerable collection of specimens of Japanese industrial Arts were exhibited in London. And this one fact, I think, sufficiently establishes the claim of the Japanese to be the creators of an original school of Art. In what this originality consists, or what may be its value and integral worth, as compared with the Art of other races, we must look for the evidences of the first not only in the subjects, but in their treatment. In both we shall find something peculiar, and materially differing from any artistic work in Europe; while a true estimate of value may be formed by the setting in of an era of “Japanisme” to which I have already referred, not in England and in

France only, but generally over Europe. In the choice of subjects, as in their treatment, the pencil rather than the pen must be resorted to for illustrations. The wood-cut facing the title-page may be taken for one example as to subject, and the following combination of bird and twigs for treatment of a comparatively trite object.



CHAPTER V.

CHIAROSCURO—COLOUR—PERSPECTIVE.

ANY survey of the field of Japanese Art would be imperfect without some reference to three important elements in all pictorial Art—Chiaroscuro, Colour, and Perspective.

Mr. J. Leighton, in his discourse on the Arts of Japan, draws the conclusion that they may be said “in an eminent degree to depend upon the picturesque, though rarely to reach the pictorial; that is to say, they never produce a picture, because the principal element of pictorial Art is wanting—light and shade.” They certainly do not, as a rule, employ light and shade to make a picture, but they are not wholly ignorant of its effect in giving to flat surfaces the deceptive appearance of objects in relief. Art, however, of the highest kind, as he observes subsequently, may and often does exist without chiaroscuro, and the defect of the Japanese on this side does not prevent their being as a people a nation of artists, with an Art faculty highly developed. They have, I think, a finer sense of the beauty of colour than of form; reversing the order characteristic of the ancient Art of the Greeks, where a love of the beautiful in

form was the first to find expression, and of colour only in a secondary degree. It has been left doubtful whether they understood chiaroscuro, any more than the Japanese do at this day. Mr. Leighton suggests that this is a power which seems to have been reserved for less sunny climes—lands of cloud and mist where colour tells the least, and neutral tints predominate. This may be hypothetical, but if one powerful element of Pictorial Art be light and shade, as he affirms, the Japanese are without much knowledge of its importance. And yet I have been much struck with the discriminating truth of the following remark in Mr. Jarves' work touching on the "Life of the artisan and his work," and of some previous assertions as to the "flatness and want of modelling of Japanese drawings." He says, "These remarks, like the similar criticism on the lack of scientific perspective, apply, it is true, largely, and perhaps entirely, to the average common Art. But their best draughtsmen, whether in Indian-ink or colour, do when they choose obtain, by gradations of either, most subtle and truthful relief and accurate and generic form." And again he continues : "They are not so happy in depicting abrupt heights, because their successive planes of horizon are adverse to these illusions. But they are very felicitous in storm effects, alternating torrents of rain, wind driven over vast surfaces, with sparkle of fleeting sunbeams ; or disguisings of grey fog, broken by scattered trees, house-tops, or ranges of high land ; or vapoury morn, or cloudy sun deepening the obscurity, rendered

more mysterious and full of gloom by the flutter of bats' wings in the faint twilight; birds passing athwart the moon, seen as flitting, ominous specks of dark, then as phantoms in the uncanny vagueness of night; oppositions of moonbeams and torchlights; volumes of rolling mists and abrupt disclosures of forms and lines, dissolving abruptly into fresh oblivion; a dash of poetical beauty and sympathetic feeling in every stroke; keenest choice of æsthetic conditions—all these and much else make up the artistic machinery of detail which is used to deepen the stress of the main motive." No better example in illustration of this peculiar power of artistic treatment could well be selected than is afforded by the drawing which faces the title-page.

The pictorial effect which results from an artistic disposition of lights and shadows, and by the quality in these which is technically termed breadth, is in a great degree unknown to the Japanese. That every light should have a focus of brilliancy, and every shadow a heart of depth, as we are taught by Art experts, has not been recognised by the Japanese as an essential condition of picturesque or pictorial Art. Equally have they failed to perceive another cardinal principle of chiaroscuro by which breadth of effect and unity are attained, namely, the graduation of each, and the grouping together in due subordination of all the lights and all the shadows, if there are more than one of each, by which lights are incorporated with shadows by graduation, and *vice versa*.

If, as has been said by a writer on technical Art,

“those effects of light and shade are most satisfactory to the eye which have manifestly some artificial or arbitrary disposition”—a position which of course may be disputed—the Japanese neglect of such means of attaining pictorial effect may perhaps be explained by their close adherence to what they observe in Nature. The simpler but artificial disposition of light and shade adopted by European artists with a view to attain pictorial effect and make a picture certain to please by the chiaroscuro alone, independently of colour, has not certainly entered into the artistic mind of Japan. Neither “a wedge-shaped breadth of light or of shade, nor a conspicuous object of agreeable form either in light or in shade, according to choice, at one side of the picture,” is ever resorted to by Japanese artists and workmen with a view to the pictorial effect. The principle so often illustrated by Claude Lorraine’s sunsets, a mass of light in the background relieving dark objects on each side, with a dark graduated intermediate distance; and that preferred by Rembrandt, of a point or focus of bright light suddenly graduated into dark shadows, as in the “Adoration of the Shepherds;” or the reverse, of general light with a point of dark, often adopted by Turner, Collins, and others—all these and many other more or less artificial arrangements of light and shadow for pictorial effect, easily recognised in European Art, have hitherto found no place in the *Liber Studiorum* of Japanese artists.

But still I am very much disposed to agree with Mr. Jarves in thinking that Japanese artists have a

technical mastery of other means not known to genre and landscape painters in Europe, by which they produce effects that place a scene before the eyes in a way to fill the imagination with a vision of things only suggested by the pencil. As this writer remarks, "The most touching bits are the landscapes. There are foreground scenes of lowlands and forests, backgrounds of distant ranges of high mountains, with intervening fog like a semi-transparent veil, broken into rifts which just disclose tree forms and hint at other mysteries of Nature, and give a glimpse of an old man sitting in a balcony watching the moon rising over the nearer hills, and silvering the whole spectacle with its pale light." Mr. Jarves is taking his example from one of the diminutive antique albums of "Old Masters," occasionally to be picked up in the recesses of a Japanese curio shop, varying from two to four inches square, and reminding us of the work of the best mediæval illuminators of missals. In succeeding chapters I shall produce several examples which, even under all the disadvantage of copies, will yet sufficiently bear out the description here given. In this department of Japanese Art the most characteristic merit, perhaps, is their *suggestiveness*. "They place a rare spectacle before the eye in a brief telling manner," as the same writer observes, "leaving the imagination, as with Nature, to work out the entire riddle and discern all that is hinted rather than directly shown;" and he concludes by saying that "if any of our more scientifically taught artists can get into a few

square inches of paper a more distinct realisation of space, distance, atmosphere, perspective, and landscape generally, not to mention appropriate sentiment, I have yet to discover the fact." So, also, with such rudimentary knowledge of the rules of perspective as they possess, they do not seem to have learned the importance of placing the point of sight out of the centre of their picture, and lower down or nearer to the base line of the picture than the top, the neglect of which is held by us to be destructive of pictorial effect. The relieving of dark objects against light, and the contrary of light against dark, and many other rules may be equally dismissed. The truth is, that they never have given their mind to the painting of pictures as such. For screens, and fans, and cabinets they invent charming designs, and very artistic groups of flowers, trees, figures, &c., but rather as materials or suggestive motives for a picture, than pictures in themselves.

Yet, as has been remarked in Chapter III., the Japanese have great dormant pictorial powers, and sometimes display them with a limited light and shade, with much of silhouette in effect. In a question of originality of conception, and power of rendering pictorially a weird and mystic subject by a poetic and purely ideal mode of treatment, the illustration facing the title-page leaves nothing to be desired, and would not be easily matched among the best efforts of European Art. It is a moonlight scene, with the moon large and full in a dimly coloured sky, across the broad disc of which a flight of strange-looking birds are shadowed with outspread wings coming from

afar, as the perspective admirably renders; while others, all in black, of strange presence, are scattered over the picture, some on a branch, others in the air, and on a shore which seems to look into endless space.

In regard to their colouring, it is with them a matter of feeling, I fancy, guided by a fine sense of harmony, and the conditions under which this can be most highly gratified. Certain it is they have none of the rules recognised in European Art as embodying approved principles derived from the practice of the great masters and colourists of the past ages. Whether the Japanese workman has any conscious knowledge of the necessity of avoiding greenish blues and greenish yellows, both being sickly in hue, and of never placing "such a green between blue and yellow, as would result from the mixture of the particular tints of those two colours which are made use of," I cannot say.* But the Japanese have a great love of tertiary compounds, and seem to be perfectly aware that these receive value by the opposition of the colour which enters least into their composition. The balance of colours, of which much has been made in *dilettante* Art criticism, and the balance of lights and shades in a picture, would seem to have no place in Japanese Art. But it is quite certain they have the finest perception of harmony and tone in colours, and rarely seem to make any mistake in the innumerable objects produced, even by the least-skilled workmen.

* See "Colour as a Means of Art," chapter on "Abstract Principles," by Frank Howard, for these and preceding quotations.

Mr. J. Leighton gives it as his opinion that “in colour, as a nation, they are very judicious, rarely producing discords, either in their attempts at picture-making or applied Art—a thing that can hardly be said of either English or French. Leslie has somewhere said, the only perfect specimen of colour he had seen was in a Chinese picture. What he would have said to those of Japan we can only conjecture—colour with perspective and shade nowhere !”

Mr. Jarves suggests that “the æsthetic temperament of a nation is most subtly felt in its use of colour;” and he believes that “in the Orient, the use of colour seems always to have been coincident with a passionate æsthetic satisfaction in it for its own sake, unchanged by time or ideas foreign to itself.” Mr. J. Leighton observes that, “in colouring, the Japanese are, generally speaking, very skilful, adopting a quiet and refined style, and using full low-toned colours in preference to excessively brilliant ones. In this they differ from the Chinese. Of course I do not wish you to understand that the Japanese artists do not use bright colours, for few men know their value better; but what I desire to convey is that they use them judiciously, and in comparatively small proportions, cleverly supporting and contrasting them with the secondaries, and other compound colours they use in grounds and large masses generally.”

I may add, so far as my own experience goes, that they want no instruction from artists in other lands as to the pleasure to be derived from “that tempering

of contrast with likeness" which is found to belong alike to the harmonies of form and sound.

Mr. Morris would seem to have taken a hint from the Japanese in his taste for painting walls and backgrounds generally of neutral greens and browns. Of course, when positive and bright colours are used in depicting objects in Nature, everything depends on the fine sense of colours in harmony, and those subtle combinations and gradations which must be felt, not described. I have heard it denied that the Oriental races have any real superiority over Europeans in their perception of the harmonies of colours, and the finer sense of these, which makes them take a special delight in bright colours. It has been argued that in India and elsewhere in Asia they show a taste for what have been styled "degraded colours,"—the magentas and other aniline products; and further, that what we have admired as Oriental patterns, with their perfect harmony of colouring and design, have been merely the work of chance, and once adopted, the conservative habits of Asiatics have sufficed to perpetuate them. I do not think there is any foundation for these opinions. Excellence, whether in colour or form, as Sir Joshua Reynolds has said, is never the work of chance, although it may be partly the result of inheritance. Instead of one pattern or one combination of colours pleasing to the eye having been adopted, it is easy to distinguish hundreds varying very much according to the period or locality. That Orientals may not have proved superior to the temptation of some Western

novelty of a debased or inferior Art to their own, and which may in addition have had the recommendation of greater cheapness, is not sufficient to justify the larger inference that they have no finer sense of beauty than those from whom they buy such goods in preference to their own. It has, I think, been truly said that it is with colour as with other elements of Art, excellence or beauty can only be produced by those who delight in it. Soft shades of grey and brown, or dull green, have much to recommend them if used in proper subordination, and with reference to brighter and purer colours; but bright and pure colours are the best, and all richness of effect must be dependent on them. A relative arrangement of tints will do much to produce harmony, but will scarcely satisfy a colourist who loves masses of the brightest hues, such as in a sunny clime are a perpetual feast to the eye, and a delight to the sense which revels in profusion. The Roman scarf or the handkerchief of the contadina, the bright-coloured sash of the Andalusian, and the glowing scarlets and gold of the Indian bazaars, are all living evidences of an innate sense of the beauty of bright and pure colours. We have not in England the sun of these Southern and Eastern climes, which gives to the skies and mountains, to trees and birds and flowers, a glory of such brightness, that colour of the most vivid and brilliant hues forms, by daily and hourly association, a needful element in the life of the people.

In this matter of colour, Mr. Jarves, who has been a close student *in Japan* of Japanese Art and its charac-

teristic excellences, evidently thinks as I do. But he would go back to the origin of the Turanian race for the distinctive gift, on which the appreciation of colour depends, and trace it to hereditary sources. "The two chief branches of the human family," he contends, "both originating in Central Asia, and which have developed the highest civilisation, are the Aryan and Turanian. The first, guided by its nomadic instincts, in the outset of its historical career became widely diffused and separated, while the second remained in more centralized and compact masses. Each distinguished itself by characteristics that have slowly crystallized into national idiosyncrasies, more or less antagonistic and one-sided as regards one another, and ending in fixed expressions of civil and religious life. The opening of lines of communication and extension of commerce have brought these face to face, if not into direct competition, to stand or fall on their own merits, or possibly to borrow from one another, and in the end intermingle." He goes on to observe that "the latest family achievement of the Aryan branch is the unæsthetic restless American people—the direct antithesis in all essentials of the Turanians. These have met on the soil of Japan, and the Japanese, as a nation mainly under American guidance, has made a plunge into such civilisation as this latest form of Aryan progress has produced." On the æsthetic side it is obvious no greater contrast or antagonism could be found; and in a question of colour we may fairly weigh what he has to say. He remarks that "a

noteworthy æsthetic trait of the Turanian is his passion for colour, whilst the Aryan shows a preference for pure form. The predominance of brilliant traits in their Art, and absolute delight therein, used with intuitive sagacity and appreciation of harmonious contrasts, gradations, and interblendings, as it were forming refined symphonies or spiritual chords of colour, are a special heritage or instinct of the Turanian family; just as those of Aryan descent are more distinguished by sculpture and architecture in general, than by a universal appreciation and skill in using colour, especially in the minor decorative forms of Art."

Passing from the part which chiaroscuro and colour play in the artistic work of the Japanese, to the consideration of perspective and their knowledge of its principles, we cannot very certainly determine how much they may have borrowed from European sources. One writer, speaking of the progress made by the Japanese, and the sources of instruction open to them, gives them credit for having acquired some knowledge of linear perspective from the Dutch. In all probability they did. In one of the numerous sketch-books left by Hoksai, and the school he founded in the last century, there is indeed a lesson in perspective, apparently derived from some Dutch source, and only partially understood (see Fig. 26).

It will be seen that, although they had some knowledge of a horizontal line passing through the field of a picture at the height of the eye of the spectator, they have not understood that the point of sight on that line

is always opposite to it, and that all lines or visual rays in parallel perspective must go to the same point of

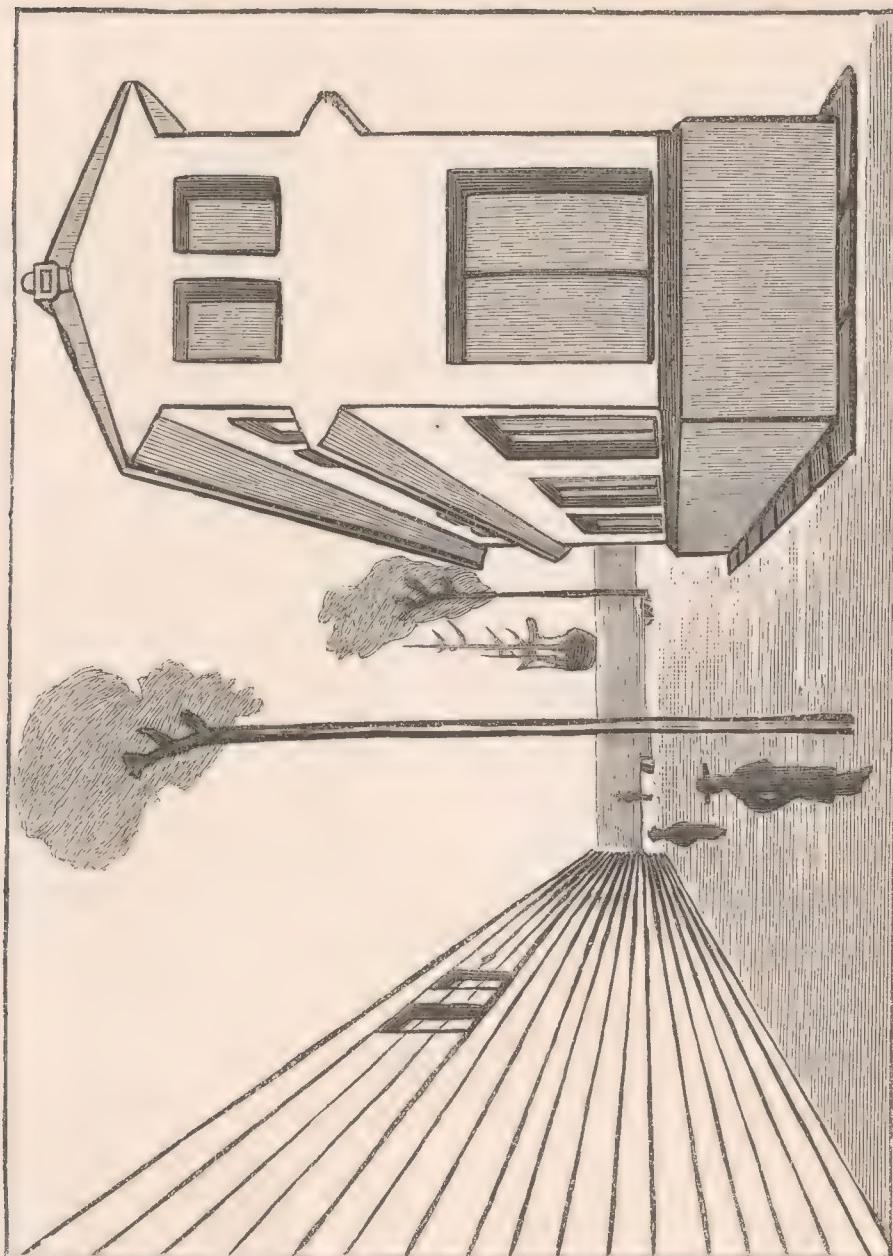


Fig. 26.

sight; whereas, although the ascending and descending lines in both diagrams go to points on the horizontal line, they go to two or more points, some distance apart.

As to points of distance out of the picture, to which all diagonal lines should go, they seem to be wholly

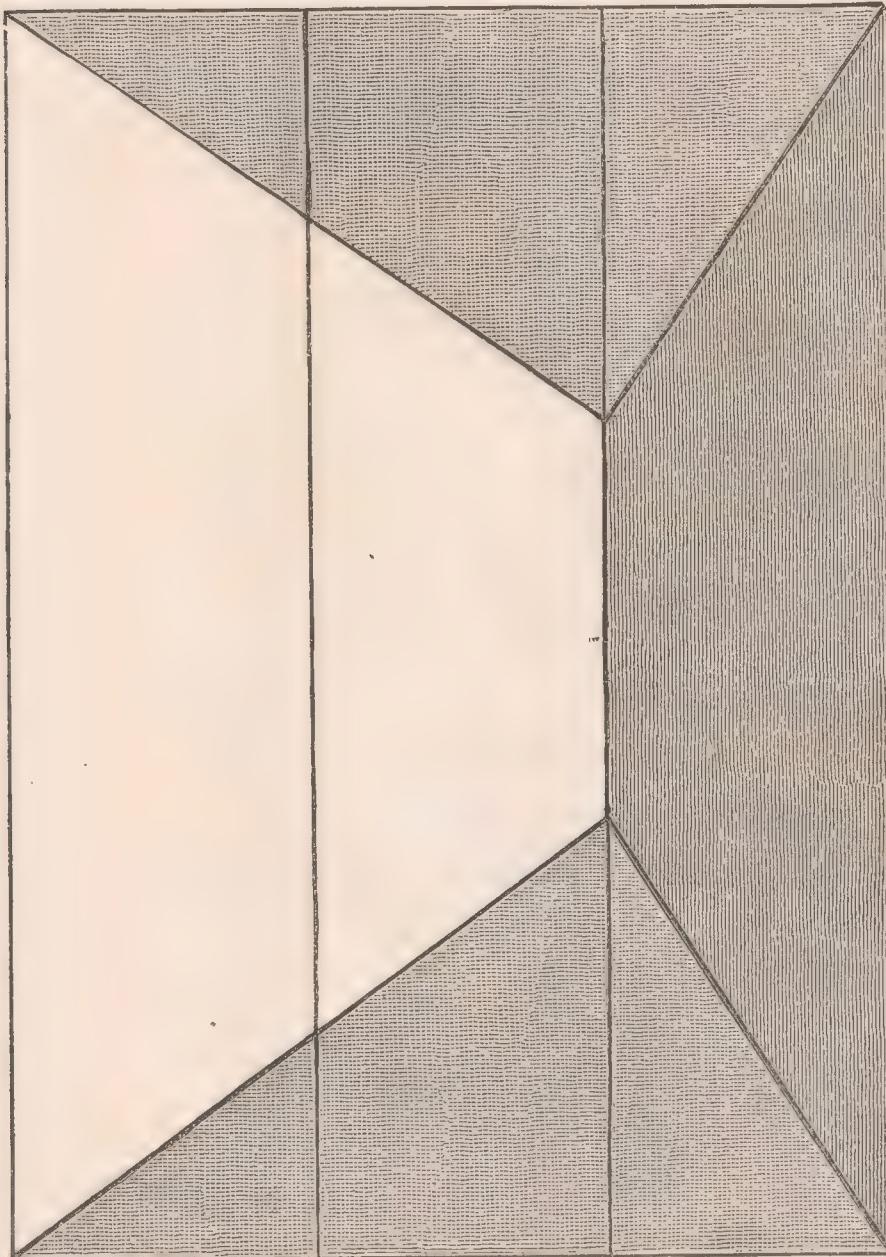


Fig. 27.

ignorant; and so of vanishing points in oblique perspective. It will be seen, however, by the next diagram (Fig. 27), they must have learned that in order to secure a

pleasing effect the horizon must not be placed equidistant from the top and bottom of the picture, but

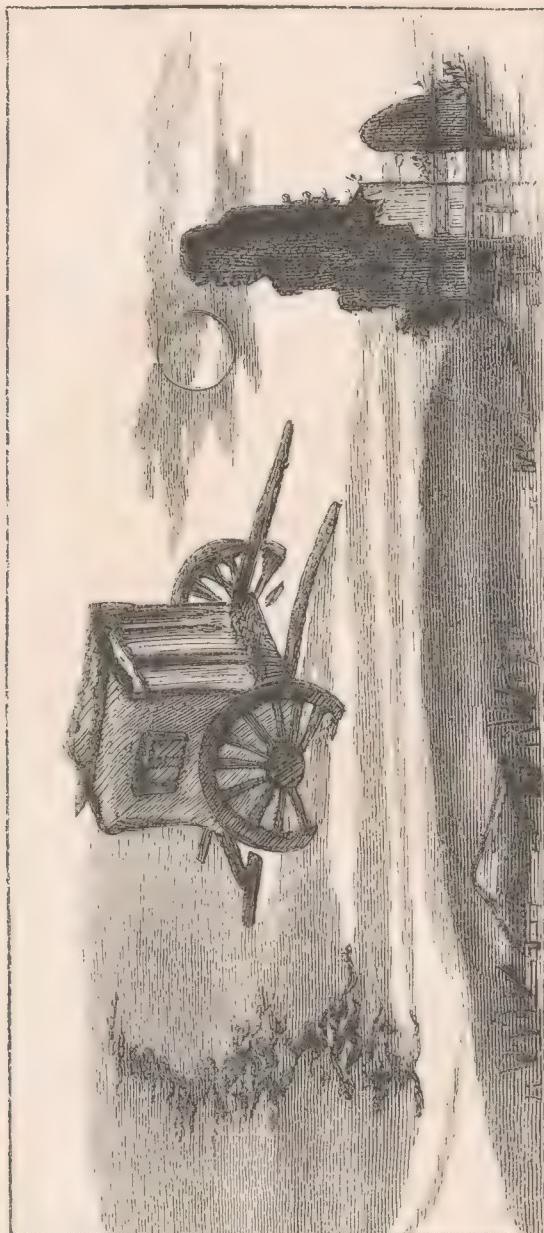


Fig. 28.

one-third or two-fifths lower or higher, according to circumstances, but never in the middle. That seems

to have been the object of this lesson, which, like the first, is defective as to the point of sight.

Nevertheless, either by some rule, or more probably by eye, in drawing a circle, as the wheel of a cart, they habitually put it into very fair perspective; as may be seen in the accompanying examples, taken from the



Fig. 29.

same book (Figs. 28 and 29), in which latter the perspective of a difficult subject is tolerably given.

Of foreshortening, in the human figure, they have some knowledge, and often attempt to overcome the difficulty it presents. Figs. 30, 31, 32, 33, may be taken as examples, in which the success is very fair. It must be confessed, however, that in perspective as in the drawing of the undraped human figure, they can make no pretension to scientific accuracy.

If they learned nothing from the Dutch, the question arises, did the Jesuit Fathers teach drawing in their schools, or occupy themselves with the Arts, as some of those at the court of Peking, in the reign of Kanghi, unquestionably did? The latter introduced, for instance,



Fig. 30.

as we know, the use of vignette medallions on the best china ware, never prior to that adopted in the ornamentation of Chinese porcelain. Then, again, some of the caricatures and illustrations of popular customs, in all their grotesqueness and coarseness, powerfully recall the Dutch paintings and engravings

of similar subjects of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the Höllen, Ostade, and Teniers style. The Japanese themselves do not admit any tuition from either of these sources, whether in perspective or the treatment of subjects for the pencil. But when we reflect on the aptitude they have shown to adopt foreign ideas and imitate European arts and customs

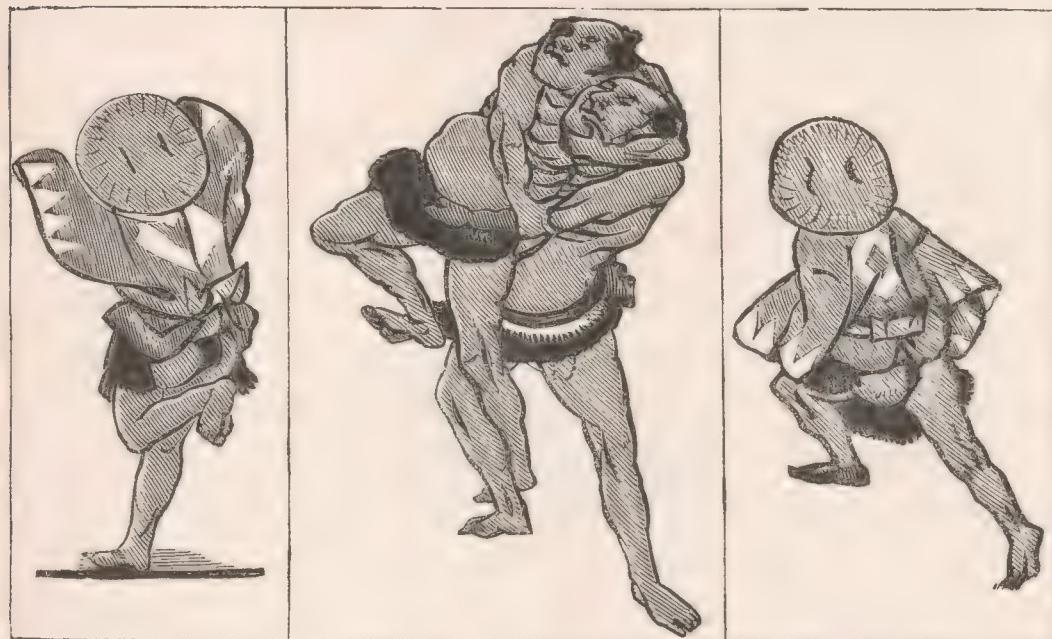


Fig. 31.

Fig. 32.

Fig. 33.

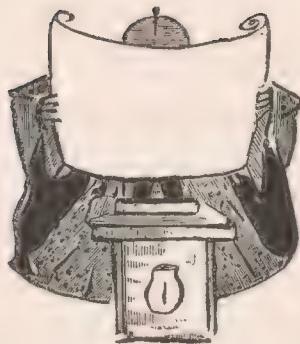
in the present day, one cannot help seeing the possibility of their having borrowed something in the way of Art. They must have had the opportunity of learning much during the greater part of a century, from the first arrival of the Portuguese and European missionaries, to their final expulsion under Taiko Sama and his successor. The Jesuit Fathers, who have left

traces of Italian forms in Hindoo buildings, may well have done far more in Japan. To answer this question, however, with any certainty, it would be necessary to be able to classify the woodcut illustrations and painting on china of the Japanese, chronologically and with perfect accuracy, and who can attempt to do this? I have never known a Japanese who made any pretension to such knowledge, except occasionally in lacquer and bronzes, or in swords. The works themselves are for the most part without marks or dates.

Whether native or borrowed, however, Mr. Leighton asserts that their inferiority in perspective, both linear and aërial, is evident. Yet he adds, "not without exceptions, for sometimes their linear perspective is nearly perfect, and their aërial perspective very beautiful, though they do not seem to understand the pictorial—that power of chiaroscuro that makes a picture." Later he remarks, in a letter to me, referring to the same subject: "A work of Art need not be a picture, and a great deal of pictorial Art may exist without much elevated conception. I have no doubt that with their imitative powers, the Japanese will some day add perfect perspective and pictorial Art to their pictures, though in the process they may possibly lose in some of the higher qualities practised in more primitive times."

Having thus briefly passed in review the merits and leading defects of Japanese Art in the three important elements of Chiaroscuro, Colour, and Perspective, we

may pass on to consider the influences under which the Art and Art industries of Japan have reached a higher degree of excellence in some directions than has been attained in any other country.



CHAPTER VI.

PROGRESS OF THE ARTS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES
LANDMARKS OF CIVILISATION—VARIETY OF CON-
TROLLING INFLUENCES—STATUS OF THE ARTIST—
POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS—ENIGMAS AND CONTRA-
DICTIONS IN JAPANESE ART.

In a previous chapter I referred to the interest which attaches to the progress of the Fine Arts in different countries, as affording certain landmarks of civilisation, by which a judgment might be formed of the civilisation, social progress, and extent of refinement attained by different nations at any period. I am unwilling that this important principle should be lost sight of, because it receives a new illustration in Japan. We know very little indeed of what took place in that country before the middle of the sixteenth century (A.D. 1542), when the Portuguese first landed on its shores; and still less of the kind or extent of civilisation attained by them in the earliest epochs of their history. But, if there be any truth in the opinion which has been put forward by some writers on Art, that where civil and religious tyranny has prevailed, the progress of the useful and elegant Arts has been slow and laborious,

the history of Japan would not have prepared us for the degree of excellence the Japanese attained in this direction. Religion, climate, political tyranny and liberty—each in turn has been held to exercise a strong controlling influence over the Arts. These, it has been said, have “flourished more or less according to the liberty allowed the artist, and the state of respect in which he was held by his fellow-man.” The degree of influence, however, exercised under any of these heads would seem to be very variable in different ages and circumstances. The long disappearance of Art in Greece, where once it made its home and achieved its greatest triumphs, can hardly be satisfactorily accounted for by any changes, either political or religious; while the climate, scenery, and associations, with all their inspiring influences on those who dwelt in the land, have remained the same. So far as bright skies and beautiful scenery, with all the various flora and foliage of a tropic and temperate clime combined, can influence artistic development, the Japanese have had all these in perfection. But their government has always been restrictive, narrow, and tyrannical; while national customs and long isolation from the rest of the world must have still more tended to limit the range of their ideas, and the scope of their efforts. Art in Japan has only been developed under these conditions. And if it were true, as Mr. Ruskin assumes, that there are only two Fine Arts possible to the human race—sculpture and painting—the Japanese can put forward no valid claim to be considered artists. They are neither sculptors nor

painters as we understand these terms. On the other hand, if Art "consists in the carving or painting of natural objects, chiefly figures;"—a further dictum of the same writer—and "that it has always subject and meaning, never consisting solely in arrangement of lines, or even of colours," and "always paints or carves something that it sees or believes in—nothing ideal or uncredited—and for the most part, it paints and carves the men and things that are visible around it,"—the Japanese may take rank among the foremost cultivators of Art in the reproduction of the natural objects—the men and animals, the trees and flowers, that are around them in a great variety of materials. This may not show their possession of the artistic culture of the Greek, but they have not the less produced, and do now daily produce, works in metal and in ivory which may fairly challenge comparison with some of the best-cut medallions and gems or statuettes of the Grecian and Roman periods. I believe this excellence to be chiefly due to their patient and minute study of Nature, more especially in birds and fishes, and in flowers and plants. In birds, particularly, they excel in depicting every character with rare fidelity and spirit. Horses and other quadrupeds they have never mastered the power of drawing correctly, strange to say, and to this hour they only produce, as a rule, distorted caricatures, when they attempt to draw them. The human face, and the figure if draped, they can handle well with chisel or pencil. The former, more especially in all its grotesque or humorous phases of expression, they often render in the

most perfect manner. We must not be surprised to find that the Japanese standard of the graceful and the beautiful is something different from our own—in colour, and form, and in the combination of the two. Hogarth's line of beauty refers to a law which may have many diversities of expression. A wavy or serpentine line analogous to Hogarth's has, however, great attractions to the Japanese. The conventional type of the Japanese women, perpetually reproduced in all their pictorial illustrations, though never really seen in actual life, is a combination of wavy lines, of which Fig. 34 in the next page is a fair specimen.

It is singular that in nearly all Asiatic countries each nation has adopted a strictly conventional type perpetuated on monuments and in pictorial records, only remotely representing the characteristic features of the people themselves. The ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, and Persians have all been so handed down to posterity. It may perhaps be accounted for, in part at least, by the facility it afforded to inferior workmen to reproduce one stereotyped form, without much exercise of individual artistic skill. In Japanese drawings there is certainly one type for the Daimios and privileged classes—a purely conventional one, unlike anything to be seen among them. A sort of exaggerated rendering of what, in lesser degree, is popularly attributed to the Norman blood, in contradistinction to the Saxons or the Celtic race of these islands. The common people, in their pictures and carvings, are always rendered in the likeness of what may be daily seen in the streets—a

lower type of face, often caricatured, farcical, and grotesque, but still representing the national features



Fig. 34.

with a great deal of truth and force. The figures in No. 34 show this conventional type of the Daimio class,

as well as the serpentine wavy line so much admired by the Japanese.

The subject of another picture now before me is a snow scene, and two children blowing or sucking their fingers convey as strong a feeling of intense cold as the snow on the ground and the overhanging branches. The principal figure, a lady of Kioto, is very gracefully designed, and the touches of colour in the dress, the flowers on the outer garment being blue on a madder ground, while the under-skirt is of a warmer tint, harmonizing with the dresses of the children, make a very effective picture. This appears on the wooden cover of a series of illustrations of their national customs—a common mode of binding such books—and the designs are often of the most graceful kind.

A third, from a similar book, is an excellent illustration, not only of a free and flowing outline of a peculiarly graceful and undulating character, but of their love of the grotesque, and power of effectively portraying incidents and grouping figures in humorous action. A child has, intentionally or otherwise, got its kite entangled with the dress of one of the Samurai passing by, and is in evident ecstasy at the trouble it occasions to the two-sworded retainer, notwithstanding the awe in which such gentry were generally held. The action of both figures is very good.

Considering how well and vigorously they can draw the human figure in action, and with every variety of grotesque and humorous expression, one is disposed to wonder that they have never learned to draw both

hands and feet with something like correctness. In these, however, as in the drawing of quadrupeds, they invariably fail. Birds, on the contrary, but more especially cranes and wild fowl, they paint and model with a fidelity and thorough mastery, such as the best European artists might envy. As regards the human figure, it cannot be from a want of knowledge of anatomy, for we have no reason to suppose that the Greeks ever dissected the human body, and without it there can be no such knowledge. As to familiarity with the nude—from which it is more natural to conclude the Grecians derived their power of accurately and gracefully reproducing all the most beautiful lines and proportions of the human figure—the Japanese have not been without that advantage. Constant opportunities for studying the nude exist, or did exist, until quite lately, in the bath-houses, where both sexes bathed in common for hours together; and in the streets and on the roads in summer, it was the exception to see a working man with any clothing beyond a loin-cloth—much too scanty to interfere with any artistic requirements. In selecting examples of their power in grotesque and humorous renderings of popular life, and the human figure in action, if draped, without any obvious defect of drawing except in the hands and feet, the difficulty arises from an *embarras de richesses*. Several examples were given in the “Capital of the Tycoon,” published in 1863, and I will only add here a few additional illustrations of their Art in this particular department.

There is no more fertile subject of satire and caricature in Japan than mothers-in-law. They do not, as a class, enjoy an enviable repute in most countries, but it is curious to find, in these remote islands of the East, how constantly the artist's pencil is employed to hold them up to popular odium. In European family relations, however, it is generally the mother of the wife that appears on the scene as an element of household trouble; whereas in Japan it is the husband's mother—who, if a widow, generally resides with a son, and rules both the house and the wife, to the latter's sorrow. In a book now before me, filled with clever illustrations of popular manners and customs, it is amusing to note how many of the drawings, with their accompanying epigrams, are devoted to this side of domestic life. Fig. 35, the first in the book, represents a mother-in-law supposed to have been superintending the practising of the young wife on some kind of musical instrument, in order that she may become a source of profit, and finishing with a lecture. The epigraph to the left, in the cursive Hirakana character, is here reproduced, merely to show how all the series carry their comment. These are somewhat enigmatical, often using words alike in sound, but with a double sense, not easy to follow and very difficult of translation, being, in addition, versified and made obscure by an ingenious involution of sound and sense. The mother-in-law is admirably drawn in front of the daughter, kneeling very submissively to receive her scolding. They are coloured woodcuts, and are equally to be admired for

the artistic assortment and contrasts of colour, and the bold handling shown in the outline and grouping.

Fig. 36 represents a variant of the same subject. The mother taking to task a daughter-in-law reproached with idleness in her work, which is thrown on the floor, and to it her attention is directed by the maternal censor, while by the side is the fatal evidence against



Fig. 35.

her in the paper lantern, which has but one needle puncture in it, instead of being covered with holes. The needle of the busy workwoman is always thrust into it as a kind of pincushion, when different coloured threads are employed. The lowly attitude of patient submission of the scolded daughter is again very graphically rendered.

The interest of the group Fig. 37 turns on another

phase of conjugal and maternal relations. The daughter-in-law, on her knees before the awe-inspiring mother, is being subjected to a kind of scrutiny, the day after her bridal, as to her personal attractions, which has nothing flattering in its motive. It appears she has brought money into the family, having been particularly ill-favoured, and among other personal



Fig. 36.

shortcomings was said to have a face without a nose. She certainly is not represented by the artist as anything attractive, but as the old beldame, with spectacles on nose, is scrutinising, she discovers that there *is* a nose, though there is even less of a bridge to it than Japanese and Mongol faces usually present.

Turning the pages, we come upon an illustration of domestic medicine (Fig. 38). It represents the applica-



Fig. 37.



Fig. 38.

tion of the *moxa*—a small cone of cotton, which is allowed to burn down to the skin, as a remedy for nearly every ill to which the flesh is heir. In this case it is going to be applied to the foot for a pain in the head—as a derivative probably, according to medical theories not unknown in the West.

Fig. 39 represents two women in the road, walking in



Fig. 39.

their clogs, which are a curiosity in themselves, and, like stilts, require for their use great practice in the wearer. It will be observed in these, and all the series, that the figures are walking, as it were, in the air—that is, no ground is ever represented. However incongruous or inartistic this may appear to us, it must

be remembered that the same custom prevailed in Greek Art. The frescoes on the walls of Pompeian houses, and in the Roman villas laid open by recent excavations, all furnish examples. The purport of the inscription is that women are like water-streams—that is, of little account. The touches of scarlet in the



Fig. 40.

dresses of both contrast with the purples and greys with a subtle harmony, and make an effective picture.

Fig. 40 shows a group full of expression—a woman with her servant, or slave, carrying her baggage—while the two creatures at their feet, meant for dogs, illustrate the defective way in which they always depict four-footed animals.

In figure No. 41 a female is seen peering through the door of a house, formed by the usual sliding and papered panel, and is both listening and observing what is going on within. The easy attitude and simplicity of outline cannot fail to strike the eye, while the bright scarlet colour of the sash, or band, at the back—the



Fig. 41.

Japanese form of a “dress improver,” and worn outside the dress for use and ornament combined—contrasts pleasantly with the neutral tint of the skirt and body.

Fig. 42 shows a mother-in-law reconciled to the presence of a son’s wife in the house by the birth of a grandson—progeny of the male sex being the desire

of all, in order to secure due performance of the annual rites at the graves of the departed, without which the spirits of the dead find no rest ; and are supposed, under such circumstances, to allow none to their descendants, but to haunt their former abodes, with no very kindly feelings towards mankind in general and their relations in particular.



Fig. 42.

Fig. 43 is borrowed from the Chinese. The son returns from school to his mother, who works hard all day to earn their daily bread and educate her only son. He tells her he has now finished and learnt enough, upon which the mother at her loom cuts asunder the threads of her web, upon which their living depended, and teaches by example that there is no time when

we can say our work is done, or there is nothing more to learn. And the apostrophe appropriately concludes with the moral that the son took the lesson to heart, and became a very learned man, leaving a great name behind him. Another group, of football-players (Fig. 44), is cleverly drawn.



Fig. 43.

Lastly, for there must be a limit here, Fig. 45 is an illustration of the poet's words, "One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin," and is otherwise full of the broad humour and grotesque exaggeration in which the Japanese delight. An unhappy

female pedestrian is caught in a violent storm of wind and rain, which splits her umbrella of oiled paper and sends her hat flying, while she is vainly trying with one hand to keep her skirts from following in the same distracting way—to the mocking delight of a Yeddo street Arab, different in outward garb from the



Fig. 44.

gamins of Paris and our own graceless urchins, but unmistakably of the same genus. The pitiless rain is well given in a few slanting lines, and the whole scene is worthy of Hogarth. Nothing is more true than an observation of the author of "*A Glimpse at the Art of Japan,*" when he says that "the informing spirit which gives such intense life can be got only by a

most sedulous observation of Nature, objectively and introspectively." So, in reference to this particular example of a street scene, he observes, "We are all familiar with French plates of the effects of a high wind on pedestrians of both sexes, who make a prurient display of limbs, and form a picture unseemly alike to



Fig. 45.

eye and fancy. The Japanese draughtsman, taking a similar event, sends drapery wildly flying, entangling arms and legs, and getting its owners into a furious turmoil, without indecency of drawing, or exciting other emotion than honest laughter." The cleverness with which the most varied expression is given to the different heads and figures, but especially the faces, by

a few touches of the pencil—the truest test, perhaps, of artistic power—is worthy of note. Despite all defects of drawing, the picture is precisely what the draughtsman intended, and tells the tale with great success. Fig. 44 (p. 118), representing a group of football-players, is good.

I think it will be seen from these illustrations that, although the Arts in Japan may not reflect the whole range of thought in the nation, they afford some indications of the stage of development reached, and exhibit many leading characteristics of the popular mind, as well as the social habits, tastes, and customs of the people.

In thus passing rapidly in review some of the leading features of Japanese Art, as it has found expression with pencil and graver, I cannot help feeling how much remains to be said before any complete view can be given. It was well observed to me not long ago by a correspondent in discussing the subject: “To feel and even instinctively understand the merit and character of a work of Art is one thing; to explain its origin, development, connection, and influences, is very different.”

It is difficult to turn over a collection of these popular books of woodcuts and illustrations, coloured and plain, of which there is an immense store, without being struck by the European character of some of the landscapes. Though the forms of Nature and vegetation are Japanese, there is a knowledge of linear and aërial perspective, together with a manner of presenting the scene, which certainly would seem to indicate a familiarity with the Italian methods of the seventeenth century.

In their common little books, with their rude woodcuts—rude as regards finish or costliness of getting up—there are many bits of landscape and moonshine full of mystery, and artistic to a high degree. It will be difficult to match from any English woodcut or block printing such effects of misty, struggling light as are often produced in these. I hope, in a succeeding chapter, to make this clearer by a few illustrations taken from the books before me. I should be sorry to close an account, however imperfect, of this phase of Japanese Art, without an opportunity of giving some evidence of the great variety of styles their different artists have excelled in; and this can only be done by the help of woodcuts.

In small figure delineation, clever grouping, and vigorous action, I do not think the Japanese inferior to the European, except in regard to sentiment and the type of beauty. Subtle or delicate shades of sentiment do not appear to be characteristic of the Japanese themselves, and certainly their types of female beauty have little in common with ours. A critic full of admiration for the Japanese artistic work, and with all the qualifications of an Art critic derived from wide experience and familiarity with many schools and peoples, remarked to me, while turning over some of these pictorial books, “These artists are not worshippers of beauty. Do they know what beauty is in the human form? They can see it in landscape, in the moonlight, in foliage, in the motion and attitudes of fish and fowl: above all, in the sportiveness and grace of little wood-

creatures, in the squirrel or the like. Why then is every man and every woman a caricature—a fright? Why is there not a trace of a *type of beauty*, though here and there we may come upon something rather quaint and piquant?" I think one answer to this criticism may be, that they have no living specimens of what is beautiful to our eye, either in man or woman. I have seen, only as exceptions, young girls of fifteen or sixteen, just blooming into maidenhood, with well-fashioned features, graceful forms, and sweet expression. The latter is indeed by no means rare among the women, even when there is a lack of beauty. But beauty is not common over Eastern Asia, among either Mongol, Tartar, Chinese, or Japanese races. Perhaps then they have not unwisely followed the old French counsel, "*Il faut aimer ce que l'on a*," when we cannot get some other and unattainable object of desire. Besides, love is a great beautifier, and familiarity tends to hide from our eyes deformity. Do not both men and women always find something to admire in the faces of those they love? The Japanese then, like their Western critics, have simply followed the universal law, and ended by admiring what they began by loving. The critic suggested another subject of reproach to which he thought they were open, and I confess myself unable to make any satisfactory defence. "There does not seem to be the least trace of sentiment or kindness between the human specimens of the race," he observed on another occasion. "They all look at each other hatefully, spitefully, absurdly, never tenderly! But the

heart of the artist must often have looked tenderly and deeply at the inanimate or inarticulate subjects of his pencil." And he concludes, as I must also, I am afraid, by exclaiming, "I do not understand it! An Art which is blind to beauty, virtue, pathos, piety, everything charming and elevating in man, and which discovers all in trees and brutes and hills and lakes and skies! Some one should write a monograph on Japanese painting, and explain it all." But these enigmas and contradictions in Japanese Art are among the yet unsolved problems of their national character and Art tendencies.



CHAPTER VII.

LIBERAL AND MECHANICAL ARTS, A DISTINCTION SCARCELY APPLICABLE TO JAPANESE WORK—REPRODUCTION OF COMMON NATURE, ANIMATE AND INANIMATE, FOR DECORATIVE PURPOSES AND STORY-TELLING; EXCELLENCE OF WORKMANSHIP AND DESIGN ATTAINED WITHIN THESE LIMITS.

If it were really important to determine the place that the Japanese are entitled to take among those nations which have left their impress in works of Art from ancient times, we ought to begin by defining in what sense the term Art is to be understood. If we take the word to be derived from *αρε*—utility, profit—it would in many respects represent the Japanese view of the subject. It has been held, however, that Arts are properly divided into liberal and mechanical, the former being cultivated without any immediate regard to the profit arising from them. Under this aspect, the Japanese, I fear, can make but small claim to be considered cultivators of Art. Deft workmanship and accuracy of eye, with great artistic feeling, are the chief factors, while the profit attending successful production has usually been the end in view. This, however, has

never prevented their cultivating, with great assiduity and success, the skill which finds its chief, if not its best employment, in contributing not to the necessities, but to the elegancies of life. And whatever directly conduces to these, and to the cultivation of taste and refinement, may fairly claim to be ranked among the Arts which tend to the elevation of man from the more grovelling desires and conditions of life. So clearly does this seem to be the case, that wherever decorative Art and the Art industries which contribute to superior accommodation have attained a high degree of perfection, other evidences have never been wanting of an advanced degree of civilisation and intellectual development.

In passing through the London streets one day, my eye was attracted by the words, in large gilt letters, "Fine Art Furniture and Decorations" placed over a shop, where it is presumed they profess to supply this kind of hybrid production in which the Fine Arts and Furniture are brought rather incongruously together. Of such upholstering Art there is a great deal in the present day, and, in Paris more especially, it is the business of a large class of skilled workmen and shopkeepers to provide for the wealthy "Fine Art furniture" in every possible variety of form and material. Nor is there any valid objection to the Arts being impressed into the service of the upholsterer, or Art being made to minister to utility of every kind, if judiciously combined. A critic of the Royal Academy Exhibition began lately by lamenting the rarity of true Art, observing that "Academic work, of which the aims are

grandeur or beauty, and the employment of these for decorative effect, as distinct from reproduction of common nature in forms, accessories, expression, and story-telling, is so rare in this exhibition that the examples of it may be counted on the fingers." We are scarcely entitled, therefore, to speak in terms of disparagement of the Japanese, if "true Art," as here understood, be absent, and the "reproduction of common nature in forms, accessories, expression, and story-telling;" constitutes



Fig. 46.

their chief artistic merit. In this direction, and within this scope, they are unrivalled in the excellence of their work and in delicacy of execution. They have, moreover, one quality of exceptional merit which must spring from a true love of their work—they scorn to finish only the front of an article, or the part most exposed to view. Ends, sides, back, all are finished with equal care; and in some cases, while the exterior of a letter or glove box, or a cabinet, is very plainly and unosten-

tatiouly got up, the interior will display the highest Art of which they are capable.

The Japanese, among other characteristics, manifest

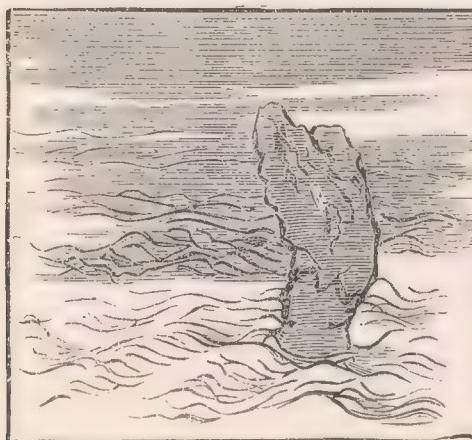


Fig. 47.

a curious fancy for the discovery of human features and forms in rocks and trees and hills, such as one sees sometimes in Nature. Figures 46, 47, and 48 are good

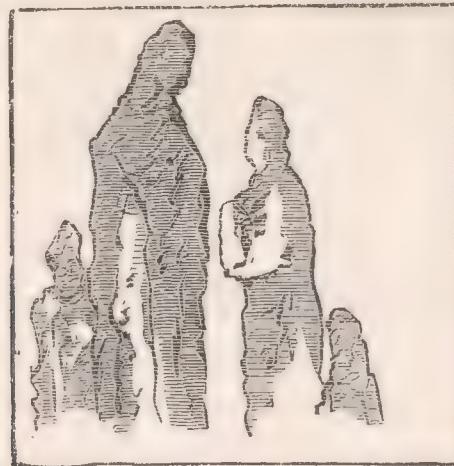


Fig. 48.

examples. They have made no mark as sculptors or painters on a grand scale; and have had no Michael Angelos or Thorwaldsens; no Titians, Correggios, or

Vandykes. They do not paint in oil, and hardly in water colours; the colours they use on paper and silk being, for the most part, body colours. Painting on walls, without being wholly unknown, is not practised to any extent in their temples, the only public buildings ever seen. Of the art of fresco-painting they know nothing. In the late Tycoon's palace at Yeddo, I saw some



Fig. 49.

decorative painting that was very effective on the walls, round the cornices, and on the ceilings; but I am not sure it was not an adaptation of block-printing and woodcuts on paper, with some additional working up by hand. What they can effect with the pencil, either in Indian-ink or colours, is best seen on fans, sometimes on large screens; and fine specimens of these could have been found some years ago, though not so readily

now—partly, I fear, from a falling off in native demand for the choicest work; but still more from the sudden and less discriminating demand to supply the European market—the two causes combining to lower the Japanese standard; while the proneness to copy European models and fashions has a still further tendency to debase the native taste.

Of the Japanese love of variety, and the marvellous ingenuity they display in their devices to secure that end, I have already spoken at length.* Form, colour, surface, all are brought into play to secure this object. Pattern upon pattern, as Mr. John Leighton observes, and form upon form, are by no means uncommon in Eastern Art. He thinks also that the way circular patches are placed upon frets and grounds is peculiar to China and Japan.

As engravers on wood, there is every reason to believe they were skilled long before the art was known in Europe. But it was not until the International Exhibition of 1862 that it was discovered, from a collection of specimens of colour-printing which I had sent there, that two quite recent inventions here had been anticipated by the Japanese;—the one being graduated or rainbow printing, and the other some method by which blocks or prints can be reduced. Those I sent, I believe with Mr. Leighton, were all hand-proofs, “worked in flat tints without a press, secondaries or tertiaries in very few instances being produced by working colour upon colour as with us, who use no outline to indicate form.”

* See Chapters II. and III.

I have already indicated, as a characteristic of Japanese Art, the studious way in which they avoid exact repetition or counterparts of lines; but I must demur to the term "lopsided" used by the last writer, to describe the result, as being not at all applicable. They attain a symmetry different from ours, it is true, but symmetry not the less, by a balance of parts differing from each other—just as in colours they never fail to supply complementary tints and harmonize the whole

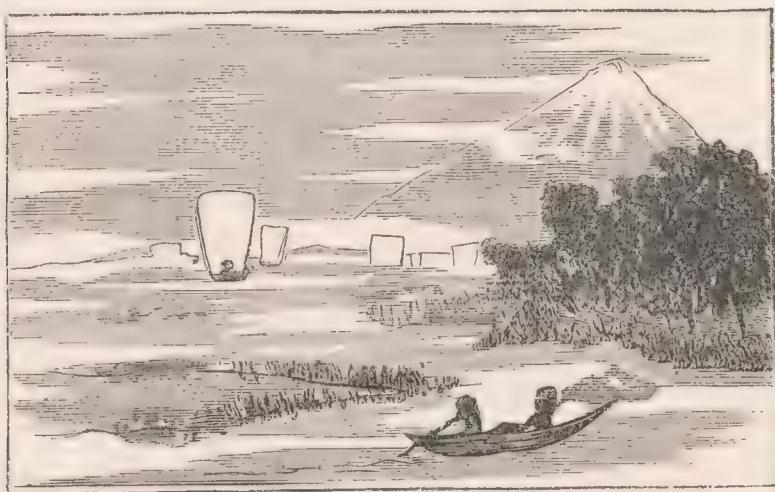


Fig. 50.

picture. I must also differ from him when he says, "The landscapes are very quaint, aerial perspective seeming beyond their powers, except in one or two cases where white mists have been attempted, as also rain, fog, and snow. In depicting clouds the Japanese artist seems sorely puzzled—the tinted ribbons they stretch across the heavens looking like labels for inscriptions rather than floating vapours." In respect to this, it may be observed that clouds and sea receive

a purely conventional mode of treatment, and are rather well-understood symbols than any attempt to reproduce the effects actually seen in Nature. The illustrations, pp. 128 to 133, give evidence of a certain familiarity with the laws of perspective, both aërial and linear, and show no mean success in adapting both to their purpose.

If these examples be examined, it will be seen that



Fig. 51.

although exceedingly slight, and merely sketched in the roughest manner, the treatment is thoroughly European, and such as would do no discredit to our own artists.

Fig. 49, for instance, represents a river scene and distant hills, with trees in the middle ground, and a reedy shore and cottage in the foreground.

Fig. 50 represents Fusiyama, the sacred mountain, in the distance; a boat in the foreground; and, near the

horizon, junks are just indicated by their sails. There are several volumes full of admirable examples of artistic feeling, and the capability of rendering both aerial effects and perspective in landscape. Figs. 51, 52, 53, and 54,

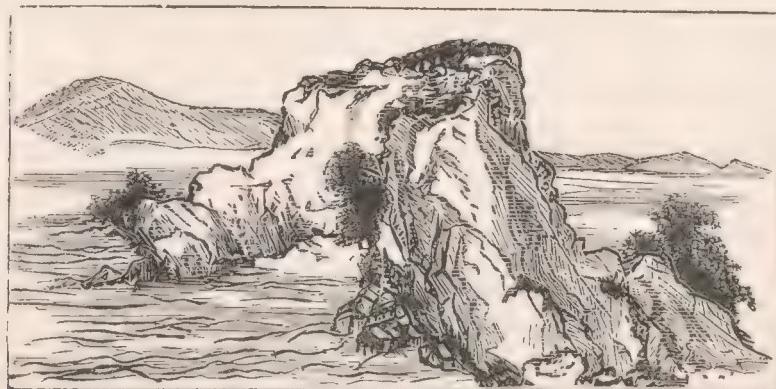


Fig. 52.

are all good examples. Fig. 55 is of a more imaginative character, depicting a moonlight scene, and the shadowy effect given to the figures on the road, like so many silhouettes, is original and effective.



Fig. 53.

The Japanese excel in nothing more strikingly than in the artistic power with which they give, by a few lines or touches, the scenes of daily life under exceptional atmospheric conditions. A snow-storm, with all

the accompaniments to the life, in some examples before me, is admirably rendered; but the artist evidently thought the feet of the figures superfluous for the pictorial object he had in view. Fig. 56, representing a basket bridge across a chasm, is very picturesquely treated.

By the same hand there is a page of very clever studies of a great variety of birds, showing how minutely and carefully the Japanese observe them in



Fig. 54.

all their attitudes and characteristic motions. I do not think the best painters of animals in Europe could dash off, with so few touches of pencil or brush, anything more artistic or true to Nature than may be observed in Figs. 57 and 58.

But by far the most perfect work of this kind I have ever seen consists of a series of studies of birds, chiefly of the falcon and hawk, which the Japanese minister in London possesses. They are the work of a cele-

brated artist of his native province of Satsuma, and I regret that the difficulty of doing them justice by a woodcut prevents the reproduction of any here. There is a falcon, with two views of the tail from behind and before, and a duplicate study of the head in different positions, than which nothing can be more perfect or true to the very life, even to the texture of the feathers. The artist, not content with one study, has evidently



Fig. 55.

taken the several parts of the bird in different aspects, and given to each the same loving and patient attention.

Indeed, it is in the study of the feathered tribes, and the drawing of birds in every variety of forms, that the Japanese have most distinguished themselves as true artists, rendering with rare fidelity and truth to Nature all the characters and habits of the subjects of their pencil, of which Figs. 57 and 58 are very inadequate examples. Hoffskai (or Hoksai), and his school, have

left a strong impress on the Art of succeeding generations. From him seems to have come a whole library of popular literature in cheap pictorial books, embodying the history, mythology, legends, trades, occupations, and national customs in a compendious form, accessible and intelligible to all. Like popular lectures or penny readings, they must have served to keep alive a strong artistic feeling among the uneducated. These pictures are interspersed with a little text; but the designs are evidently chiefly relied on for conveying the information

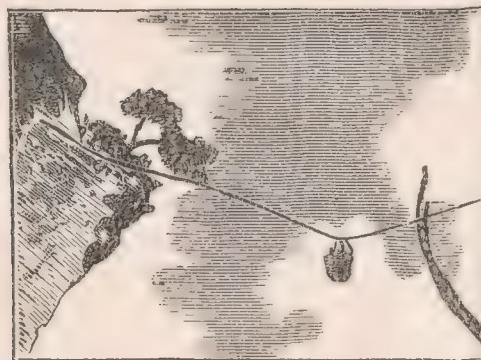


Fig. 56.

desired. We have here the entire life of the people in a cheap handy form—Art and instruction for the million in the least costly and most attractive shape. It is plain that this school went to Nature for its inspiration, and thus reproduced as in a mirror the popular life of its day. Hoffskai, we are told, was in the habit of going about the streets sketch-book in hand, and at all hours, transferring to its pages the figures, effects, and incidents passing before his eyes. The same kind of study and practice gave to Hogarth much of his power, as also to another artist less

known to fame, but whose name is familiar to foreigners connected with China in the first half of this century—Chinnery. A resident at Macao, he never allowed himself to go home to breakfast until he could bring with him at least one study from Nature—a group of figures, boats, animals, or street scenes; and they



Fig. 57.

were of the rarest merit and fidelity. For illustrations of Chinese life in its various phases, he might have rivalled Hoffskai and all his school. These pictorial representations, as Mr. Jarves very truly remarks, "focus into a small compass all that is best and worst in their taste, true or false, in the Japanese character and deportment, without the least disguise or

affectation. It is plain to see that these designs are the untutored language of a race, or at least of a class, very fond of holding up their mirror to Nature, indifferent as to the moment it reflects their ideas or image, and what it discloses. There is an unmistakable generic similarity of expression and method in all, indicating a



Fig. 58.

common fountain-head or school of Art, but exhibiting various degrees of merit and distinctions of touch and style, showing different hands, from the most masterly to the more timid or conventional of a pupil or an imitator."

Figs. 57 and 58 may serve as specimens of some of the most striking or excellent of these. A series of single-

line sketches is shown in Fig. 59, in which the artist begins at one end of his subject with his pencil, and never takes it off the paper until the figure is complete,



Fig. 59.

in one continuous flowing outline; a *tour de force* which many artists in Europe would find it difficult to accomplish with the same ease and freedom.

In Fig. 60 will be observed another series treated in a similar manner, representing a wrestling-match, the wrestlers, it may be remarked, being always esteemed according to their size and obesity. In another now before me, the men engaged, the spectators, and judges are all represented in the last degree of emaciation, and are admirable as a caricature.

Fig. 61 shows a free fight among equally attenuated

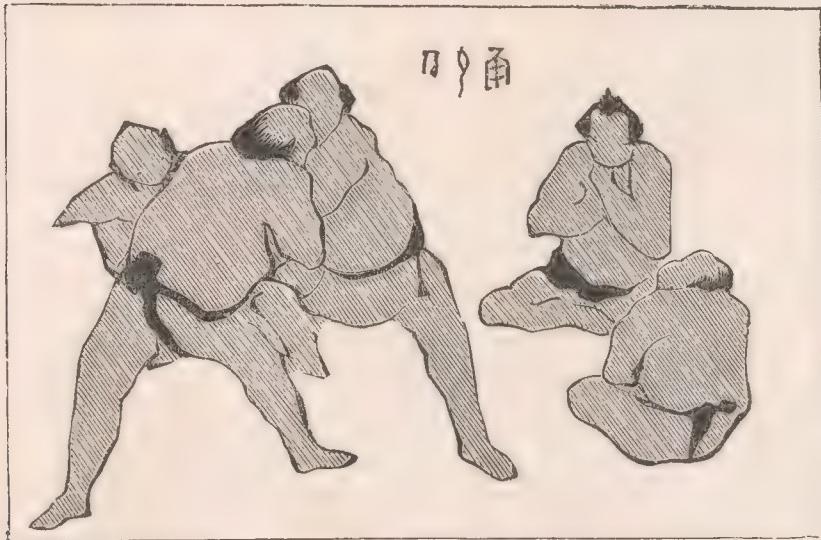


Fig. 60.

combatants, but all full of vigorous action. Some of the figures and groups, giving scenes of daily life, are, as Mr. Leighton has observed, "full of fun and first-rate drawing, being quite equal in spirit to anything done here in the present day; ay, and done with a few lines and marvellously little effort." This is high praise coming from an English artist. He adds, they excel "particularly where there is action; for, curiously, some of the best are figures in movement. Here we have

porters lifting, balancing, and carrying their loads, an acrobat poising his companion, a juggler, street-boys full of mischief or weeping over broken dishes, &c.—a hundred and one phases of social and animal life.” See Fig. 61 for an example; and the group of diving-girls (Fig. 62) seeking a kind of oyster in the Sea of Suanada



Fig. 61.

is very good, representing the action of diving and ascending.

For vigour, and the power of rendering figures in movement, they certainly show a special talent. Here is a group of dancing figures, all draped; and yet through the enveloping folds of the dresses the vigorous action of each is perfectly rendered (see Fig. 63, p. 142).

In the following (Fig. 64), the nearly nude figures of

the running postmen, the one carrying a lantern and the other the bag, or box rather, of despatches, together with the walking figure they have just passed, and the roadside trees giving a contrast of immobility, make together a perfect picture. When I was travelling along the high-roads I often met these primitive post-office messengers—always sent by twos, in order, in case of

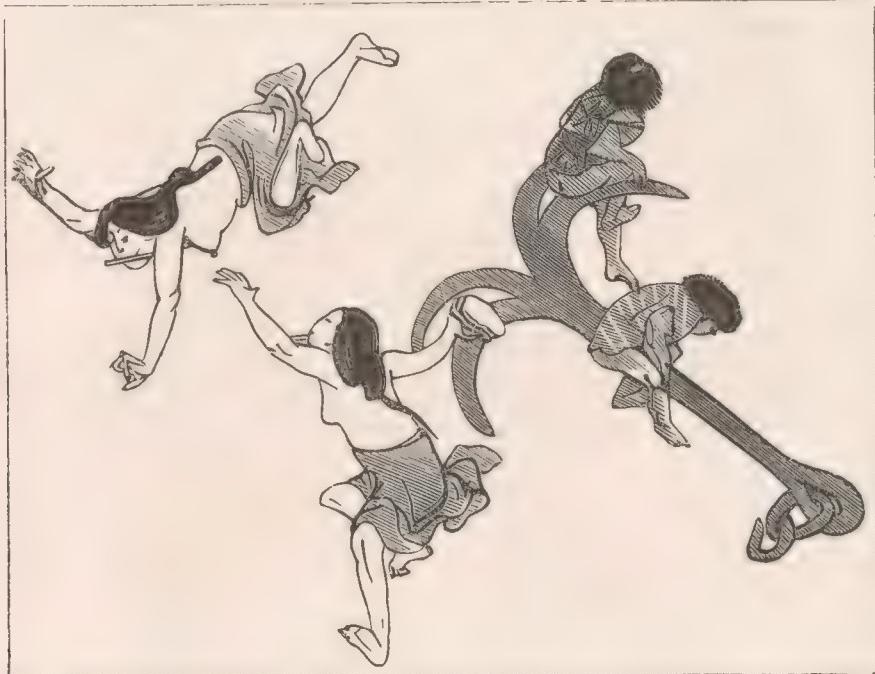


Fig. 62.

accident happening to one, that the other might snatch up the box, and continue his journey without a moment's delay. This was only some fifteen years ago, and now Japan has the electric telegraph, railroads, and an organized post-office system, to utilise the most rapid modes of transmitting correspondence according to the latest improvements of the West! This picture deserves

to be rescued from oblivion, if only as a relic of the custom of a past age, which in a few short years has become nearly if not wholly obsolete.

Here is another clever picture of two *kanga* bearers, and their burden seated within, in the shape of a Japanese traveller, while the attendant is following in the rear. All the figures are in motion, and admirably given (Fig. 65).



Fig. 63.

I have said that, as a rule, the Japanese utterly fail in their drawing of quadrupeds—of horses, dogs, and cats, but the former more especially perhaps. In Fig. 66, however, will be seen an example of men on horseback, in which both the horse and his rider, in the most violent action, are rendered with some approach to correctness and great spirit.

The variety of these illustrations of national life, and of Art applied to this purpose with infinite humour and



Fig. 64.

grotesqueness, renders it difficult, by any limited selections of examples, to do them common justice. Skeleton

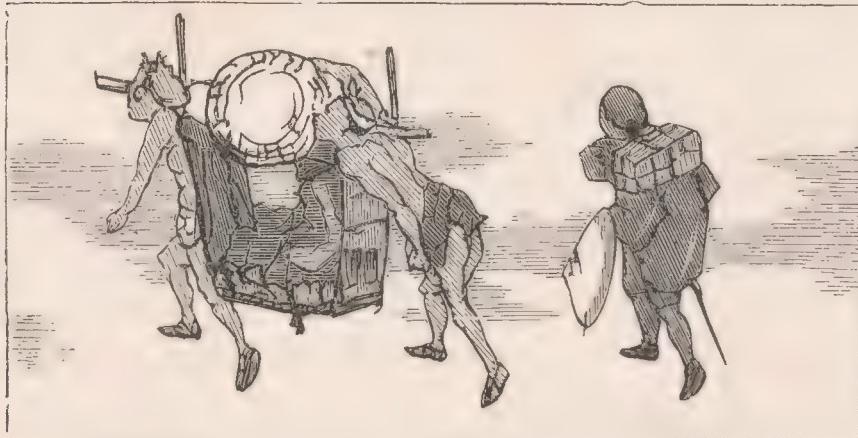


Fig. 65.

and emaciated forms, exaggerated obesity, the clothed and the nude figure, are all called into requisition to



Fig. 66.

tell the tale. In Fig. 67 may be seen three of the common people—giving the attitudes of women oppressed with Falstaff's sense of a "too solid flesh," which are admirable in their way as samples of Hogarthian Art.

Here again (Fig. 68) a man and his wife are roused from their sleep, and, with scanty night-gear, attempting to catch the disturber, who is seen scampering off in the dark, while the woman is trying to light a match, and the good man is under the delusion that he has got his tormentor safe under the box-cover. These few specimens, though far inferior to the originals in sharpness, delicacy, and vigour of touch, may suffice to convey some idea of the Art by which the vital points and characteristics of things are rendered.

I have already referred to the frequent evidence in Japanese Art of careful and appreciative study of



Fig. 67.

Nature, but more especially of birds, insects, fishes, flowers, and plants. Almost every one of the innu-

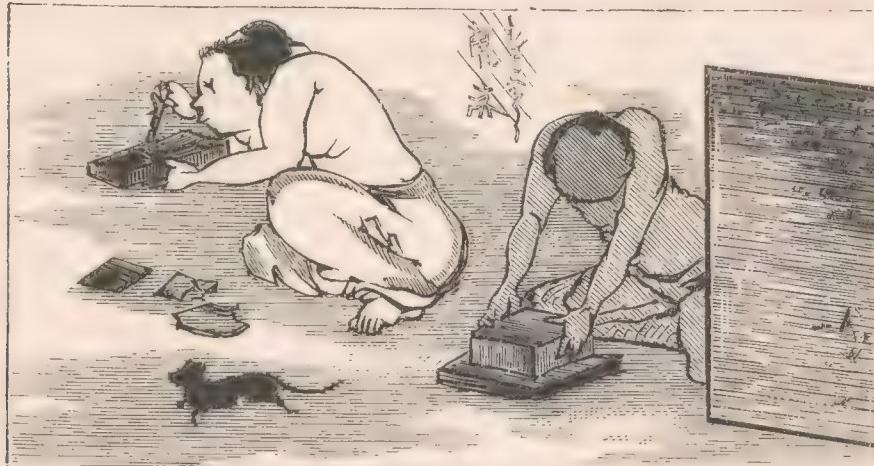


Fig. 68.

merable books of pictures, published in Tokio and elsewhere, contains some specimens of these studies.

If the objects in Fig. 69 be examined, the grace and artistic treatment of the most common grasses and wild flowers will be readily recognised. The same observation applies to Fig. 70, in which various insects are minutely and faithfully depicted.

But in nothing they attempt does the excellence of



Fig. 69.

the Japanese in this faithful rendering of natural objects appear more strikingly than in birds. Fig. 57, already referred to, affords many good examples. Ducks in the water, and storks in flight or standing on the sedgy shore, are equally well given.

Their merit in composition has been fully recognised

by Mr. Leighton, who remarks that although, like the early artists of other nations, they make their point of sight very high, all figures being as if looked down upon, they yet show admirable lines in all their figures and in groups of two or more.

Enough, I think, has now been said to show that over a wide range of artistic work they have many claims to

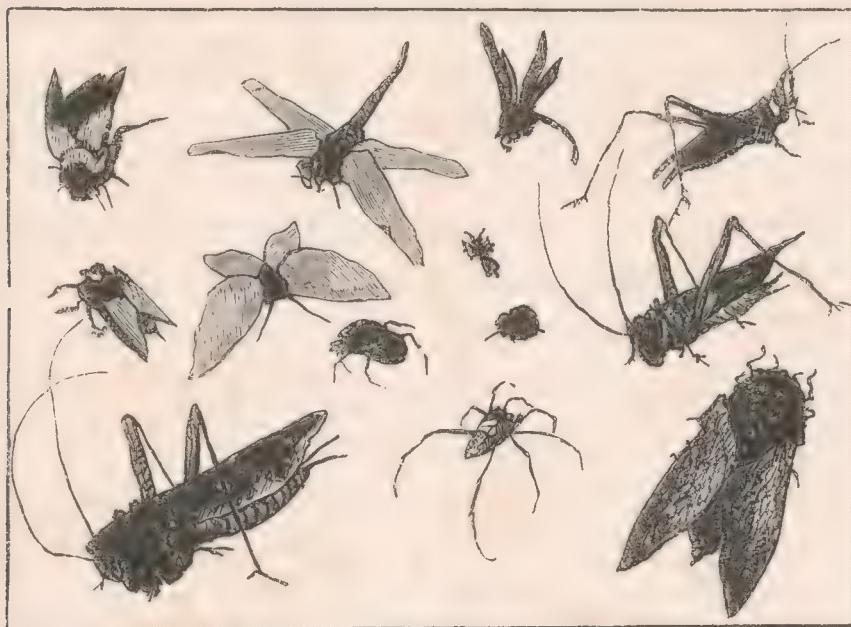


Fig. 70.

admiration, although it may be that in decorative Art we must look for the greatest novelties and originality. Mr. Palgrave says, in some remarks on Japanese Art, that the only living schools of decorative Art in existence must be sought in India, China, and Japan. He adds—and I entirely agree with him—that “a useful service would be conferred by any one who, with a competent taste and knowledge, should now make us

acquainted with the principles which underlie the excellence attained in India, China, and Japan." And he marks, as a characteristic feature, that "the pains they take to avoid symmetry and evenness is as great as the pains we take to secure them."

Some further remarks by the same accomplished critic are so apposite that I venture to quote the following, both as confirming and supplementing what I have already said on the subject:—"The peculiarity of Japanese decoration, however it may have been reached—probably by true instinctive judgment—might, we think, be summed up by saying that decorative Art in Japan is based on the same principle as pictorial Art. The same avoidance of identical forms or symmetrical arrangements, the same desire to conceal the Art beneath a look of Nature, guides a painter amongst us as a decorator amongst them; in other words, they draw no sharp line between Art pictorial and Art decorative. No sounder canon was ever laid down by the best writers, or worked out by the best artists. It is, in fact, the course followed by all the European schools which have been really great in ornament—being true of Greek, Italian, and Byzantine decoration (the latter inheriting directly from the old Hellenic traditions), not less than of Romanesque and Gothic." "Artists have succeeded in decoration," as Mr. Ruskin ably pointed out in one of his lectures, "in exact proportion as they were arduous and successful in the study of human form and of natural facts; . . . you cannot have good designing in patterns for your dress unless the designer

can draw the figure beneath the dress as well." Again, "It is impossible to set out a diaper, or devise figures for a wall or a carpet, unless the artist is familiar with actual leaves and boughs and flowers—nay, unless he habitually lives in the study of these, and only gives his less numerous hours to drawing ornament. Japan, the most perfect of the three countries in decoration, is that in which all the other branches of Art have been carried farthest. The small ivory carvings and castings in brass are by far the most natural and vivid work of the kind which we have seen from any Oriental source, whilst the fine and true feeling of the Japanese, not only for birds and beasts and vegetation, but for landscape in its larger features, is shown with equal clearness in the lacquer-work and the popular coloured books. In these, besides a certain limited but decidedly marked sense of humour, there appears to be considerable dramatic power in the human figures; and the landscape backgrounds are not merely characteristic in themselves, but seem also, so far as we can decipher the plot of the stories, to take their place in illustrating the sentiment of the scene, as they do in the pictures of Hogarth or Leslie. It owes its excellence to the fact that it does not aim at being simply decorative, but is the best form of Art which the craftsmen can compass, and is successful exactly in proportion to their power over human form and the facts of Nature." This, taken as a whole, is by far the most discriminating and appreciative critique I have anywhere found on Japanese Art. I cannot believe,

however, that this excellence in decorative Art is either due to, or in any degree dependent on, a mastery over the difficulty of drawing the human figure. Whenever the Japanese draw the naked figure, it is certain to be distorted and out of drawing in many parts—the hands and feet notably and invariably; but they are masters in the art of grouping figures and presenting them in motion, while as colourists they might supply a new school of Art for European students.

They have the same intuitive feeling for waving and flowing lines that made Hogarth discourse so enthusiastically upon their value in his "Analysis of Beauty." "The eye," he observes in one passage, "enjoys winding walks and serpentine rivers, and all sorts of objects whose forms are composed principally of what I call the waving and serpentine lines—of a certain intricacy of form that leads the eye a wanton kind of chase." And this is precisely the chase in which the Japanese delight, and rarely fail to promote.



CHAPTER VIII.

ARTISTIC RENDERINGS OF THE SUPERNATURAL, AND THE MYTHOLOGY OF JAPAN — THE REALMS OF GNOMES AND SPIRITS.

IT would be impossible to give an adequate view of the character of Japanese Art, or indeed of the claims of the Japanese to take a place in the history of Art as the creators of a school of decorative Art independent of foreign influences, without devoting some attention to their power in delineating not only the familiar scenes of daily life and natural objects, but their conceptions of the supernatural, and a purely visionary world. Into this, it will be seen, they carry their love of the grotesque, and the spirit of exaggerated expression noticeable in their pictures of national life and customs. They seem to have wonderful dreams and visions of another world, and possess a whole mythology of gnomes and spirits, showing an inexhaustible vein of *bizarre* invention, to feed which they lay under contribution the whole field of Nature—animal, vegetable, and mineral. It is only when they throw themselves wholly into grotesques and



the realm of visions, that this side of their character and its irresistible tendencies can be fairly appreciated or understood. There seems then to be no limit to the extravagance of their invention, or the fertility of their imagination. A grave procession of grasshoppers carrying a fantastic *norimon* (a kind of sedan-chair used by Japanese dignitaries) forms one of the subjects. In it is

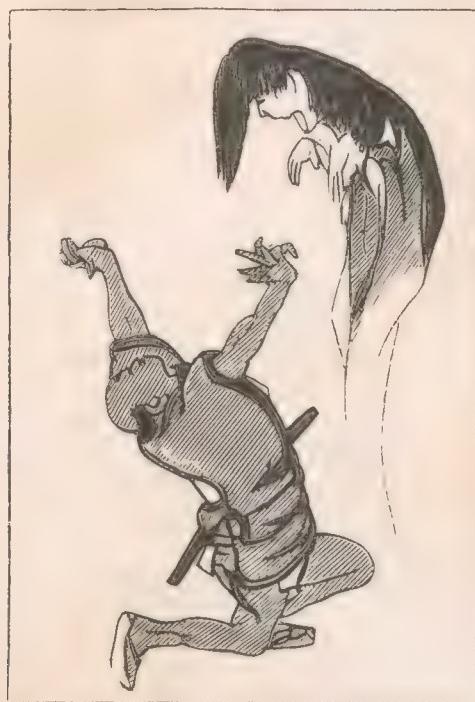


Fig. 72.

seen a King Grasshopper; the different insignia of rank are carried aloft, as used to be the custom when the Tycoon or any Daimio moved out; and all are given with a serio-comic air of burlesque worthy of *Charivari* or *Punch*. Another shows a procession of foxes, animals that play an important part in the popular mythology, treated with the same farcical gravity. Mr. Alt had

in his collection, among many other admirable illustrations of Japanese work and Art, a large picture of one of these grasshopper processions, burlesquing, with



Fig. 73.

a political and satirical meaning, the ordinary Daimio's progresses through the country. It is painted on silk with a degree of care and elaborate skill, which shows that they deemed it worthy of their best artistic power.

If it be desired therefore to form a correct judgment as to the amount of fancy and imaginative power which the Japanese display in their artistic work, we must go



Fig. 74.

to the collections of mystic figures and illustrations of their superstitions, including their demonology. Many of the latter series represent human figures with wings

and clawlike feet, and often a proboscis-like elongation of the nasal organ, with which they play all kinds of games and tricks. Fig. 71 may serve as examples.



Fig. 75.

We shall come to other illustrations of these, wild fancies in metal and in ivory, for they never seem tired of producing them in every possible form and material.

Fig. 72 (p. 153) represents some vision of a water-sprite or aërial visitant, who is throwing the spectator into wild excitement by her apparition.

Fig. 73 is something of a similar kind, but differently treated. It represents, I believe, a tomb at which a husband has been praying, and the spirit of his wife appears to console him for her loss, and prove her satisfaction at such evidence of constancy.



Fig. 76.

Fig. 74 is the same subject reversed. Here it is the wife that is constant, and the departed husband visits his disconsolate widow.

The next (Fig. 75) introduces us to something less benevolent. A pilgrim husband, it may be, visiting the tomb of a lost wife, finds her over his head, and in anything but an amiable mood. She has a most diabolic leer, and her hands look very like claws ready to tear

his flesh. As Mr. Walton says in his lecture on the "Asiatic Origin and Mythological Meaning of many of our Popular Stories,"* in which he speaks of the peculiar ideas about the dead prevalent in the east of Europe—"where visitors from the grave make their appearance not as mere phantoms, but as material vampires strong in limb, and actuated by a terrible thirst for blood."

The subject is evidently a popular one, for there are a



Fig. 77.

great number of variations introduced in its treatment. The last I shall present (Fig. 76) gives a beatific vision, it may be of a spirit-wife or the Queen of Heaven, to whom adoration is being offered by the worshipper below.

As we proceed we come upon whole pages of super-

* Lecture by R. S. Walton, M.A., "Concerning the Asiatic Origin and Mythological Meaning of many of our Popular Stories."

natural beings, wood and air nymphs, or sprites, such as have never been conceived by Western brains. Of these Figs. 77 and 78 may be taken as specimens.

Fig. 79 is the demon of gambling watching his victims coming out of a cobweb, and looking on with eyes like those of an octopus and flexible feelers



Fig. 78.

watching for the result: all are drawn with great force and expression.

In Fig. 80 will be found a very clever illustration, showing how the artist has succeeded in giving the effect of a dream or vision. To the right are the spectators, drawn in colour and firm line; to the left faint figures in outline, wonderfully drawn, and diminishing in the distance both in force and size.

Two other examples of dreamland, or opium-inspired visions, must close this series. Fig. 81 shows the recumbent body of a maiden below, while her head, with a long spiral attachment, is floating above, enjoying the pipe, under the influence of which the body is lying



Fig. 79.

prostrate and asleep. Fig. 82 is somewhat similar, only the smoker is a man, and in a sitting posture seems to have been seized with a sudden desire to visit a neighbour who is performing on a musical instrument, and is regarding this apparition of a head without its body with something of surprise, if not of dissatisfaction.

The grotesque and absurd effect of the whole is heightened by the performer's outer garment being hung over the spine, or elongated spinal cord, as though it were a convenient clothes-line (see p. 163).

In these volumes there is likewise a remarkable diversity of styles, independently of the relative degrees of graphic power and mere artistic ability, some repre-



Fig. 80.

senting popular scenes and incidents in a natural way ; but, as a rule, Japanese artists seem to have an irresistible desire for indulging in exaggerated action in all their figures.

It is impossible to reproduce in these pages more of the examples which crowd upon us in these popular picture-books—for such they are. Among the single-line drawings, as they are called, there is one, however,

which instantly attracts attention, and which must not be left out (see Fig. 83, p. 164), for it is both a picture



Fig. 81.

and a story, told in fewer lines than has been hitherto thought possible. An aged couple are paying their worship to the rising sun, while two storks are taking

their flight in the distance. Each of these three objects, the figures, storks, and sun, being emblematic of immortality, the whole is allegorical, and full of meaning to a Japanese.

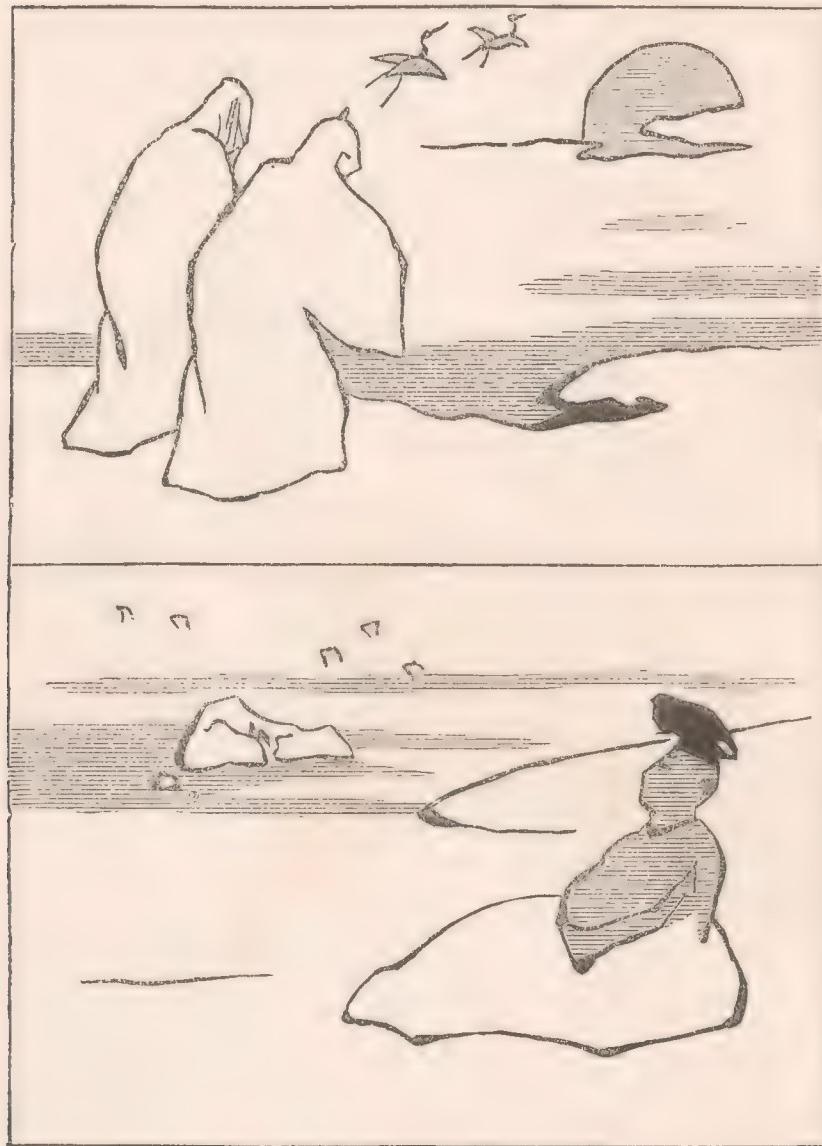
Mr. A. B. Mitford, sometime Secretary to the British



Fig. 82.

Legation at Japan, in his "Tales of Old Japan," observes that "the belief in ghosts appears to be as universal as that of the immortality of the soul, upon which it depends. Both in China and Japan the departed spirit is invested with the power of revisiting the earth, and in a visible form tormenting its enemies

and haunting those places where the perishable part of it mourned and suffered. Haunted houses are slow



Figs. 83, 84.

to find tenants, for ghosts almost always come with revengeful intent; indeed, the owners of such houses will almost pay men to live in them, such is the dread

which they inspire and the anxiety to blot out the stigma."

Fig. 84 is a suggestive picture of a similar character as to treatment, representing a contemplative figure with a distant sea horizon.



CHAPTER IX.

ARTISTIC WORK IN METALS—BRONZES.

IN bronze and other metals the Japanese need fear no comparison, within a certain range of subjects, with the best work which Europe can show. They have, it is true, nothing to put by the side of the *chef-d'œuvre* of John of Bologna, Benvenuto Cellini, or indeed many later European artists; simply, it would seem, because they have never attempted to acquire the power of drawing or modelling the human figure with accuracy. Except for their idols—and these have a distinctly Indian origin and type—they never attempt large figures, nude or draped. But in artistic treatment in metals, of small groups and natural objects, such as are depicted in their woodcuts, they have attained very rare excellence; and in nearly every department—in casting, engraving, chasing, inlaying, and damascening—they seem to have little, if anything, to learn from Europe. In bronze casting and moulding I consider them masters. They are equally capable of colossal and minute work, and I believe there are processes known to them of which we are wholly ignorant. In the Report of the Jurors of the International Exhibi-

bition of 1862, the numerous specimens of brooches, clasps, and medallions, in various metals, which I sent, together with two unique equestrian statuettes, standing about two feet high, were noticed in their award of a medal, in the following terms, under the heading "Japan :"—

"For a collection of bronzes of characteristic excellence, this collection is very remarkable: the smaller fancy objects, such as brooches and clasps, are admirably executed. In all the figures the national character is represented with perfect truth and expression. These objects are principally in iron, relieved by partial overlaying of gold and bronze. Great aptitude is evinced in these works."

A very competent judge in such matters, Mr. Hunt of the firm of Hunt and Roskell, and one of the jurors of the International Exhibition, once said, in answer to my inquiry whether the artists and skilled workers in metal employed by the first jewellers and silversmiths in London could produce equally good specimens of their art, "that they might, but only at such a price as to preclude any chance of sale." Now, the brooches and other articles I referred to had cost in that day a few "boos" each—say from ten to twenty shillings. He also added that, "after careful examination, he was convinced the Japanese were in possession of some means not known in Europe of forming amalgams, and of overlaying one metal on another, and in the most minute and delicate details; introducing into the same subject, not covering an inch, silver, gold, bronze,

&c., so as to make a variegated picture of divers colours."

I had selected a few of the finer specimens of these still in my possession to be engraved, but I am satisfied, on further reflection, that nothing short of the finest work of the graver, aided by colour, could give a fair idea of the minuteness, delicacy, and graphic power shown in the originals; and to produce them in any imperfect way would not only mislead, but do great injustice to the Japanese, to whose skill and artistic genius these works owe their excellence.

The description Mr. Audsley gives of this finer metallic work furnishes more specific information on the processes followed than I have found elsewhere. He says in his lecture :—

"Perhaps the most characteristic of all their metallurgic works is that called by them *syakfdo*. In this, numerous metals and alloys are associated, the designs being produced in colours through the agency of the various coloured metals; white being represented by silver, yellow by gold, black by platina, all shades of dull red by copper and its allies, brown by bronze, and blue by steel. Gold, silver, and polished steel, of course, represent themselves in designs as well as abstract colours. A red garment, embroidered with gold and clasped with silver, would be executed in red-coloured copper, inlaid with gold, and furnished with a silver brooch. The sword in the hand of a warrior would be in polished steel, and, if bloody, would have red copper inlaid on it. These instances will suffice to illustrate the

general mode of producing coloured designs by the exclusive use of metals. I have seen many beautiful specimens of *syakfdo*, and can bear witness to their faultless execution."

How they came to attain this perfection of workmanship in this particular industry is partly to be accounted for by the fact that formerly the most valued of a Daimio's possessions was a highly tempered and trustworthy sword—or rather, a pair of swords, since the privileged classes always wore two—possessions which were transmitted from father to son, and treasured as heirlooms. They gave very high prices to the most celebrated armourers for these weapons—as much, I have been informed, as £500—and it was their habit to have the guard inlaid with the finest designs in relief, and with one or more of these medallions or *syakfdo* on the handle. Hence the demand, as with the knights and nobles of the Middle Ages, for the finest workmanship of damascene, inlaying, and *repoussé* designs on their armour. Their tobacco-pouches were similarly ornamented with medallion clasps. As a Japanese noble, however wealthy or high in rank, wore no other ornament on his person, he could afford in these two appendages to lavish any sum that could command the highest Art. And the supply appears to have answered the demand.

When the best work was not so rare as it has now become, and it was possible to find pieces of a past age far exceeding in value, as in beauty of form and workmanship, any of the productions of a more recent date, I obtained many for the Exhibition of 1862. Whoever

possesses any of these should value them highly, for, to all appearance, they are not likely to be reproduced, from the failure of native demand and patronage.

This marvellous delicacy of touch and execution is the more remarkable, because in the fashion of their tools, as in their smelting and refining processes, so far as I have had any opportunity of observing, everything is of the most primitive kind. Their ovens, furnaces, &c., are simple and rude; yet, judging by the work, they must have a perfect command of their materials, from the ironstone to the steel of their sword-blades. If we could obtain a fuller knowledge of the processes employed, it is possible we might learn much that was interesting, if not valuable, both to British metallurgists and to iron-smelters. There is, for instance, a mixture of reddish-yellow and dark black-green bronze, as if the two metals had been with difficulty stirred up and mixed together when in a semi-fluid state, the composition of which is, I believe, unknown in Europe. As to their bronzes, while they rival the Chinese in the excellence of the metal and their command over the material, whether in casting or chasing, I think they surpass them, in this as in many other materials, by the variety, fancy, and grace of design.

As a means of comparison I have had engraved one of the finest specimens of Chinese bronze of an early date now in my possession (Fig. 85). It represents a flat peach, peculiar, I believe, to the north of China, a branch and leaves forming the handle. A richly chased band is round the centre and also the top, which forms a lid, representing, with the utmost delicacy, a scroll-work.

The colour of the bronze is very rich, and over the surface are interspersed, irregularly, gold patches, as if nuggets had been embedded in the substance of the bronze when being cast, and afterwards polished down to the surface. This, indeed, is the account given by the Chinese from whom it was obtained at Peking. There is a legend of a Chinese emperor, many centuries back, having two



Fig. 85.

palaces burnt down, and bronze and gold and silver articles having been all fused together and inseparably mixed; the order was given that other articles should be made to replace those lost, of the fused and mixed metal, and the decorative effect thus produced by gold and bronze together, is said to have given rise to the fashion of producing bronze objects splashed with gold

as an ornament. The signet underneath indicates an imperial destination, and it is certainly not modern; it has probably at one time or other adorned a room in the palace, and either found its way to some Mandarin as a gift, or otherwise got into the hands of the curiosity dealers, who, like our jewellers and silversmiths, have many old and rare things brought to them in pledge as a means of raising money, which are never redeemed, and so get into the hands of collectors. Nothing can exceed the finish of detail and surface, or the taste of the whole design. The stand is carved in a dark hard wood susceptible of a fine polish, called by the French *bois d'aigle*, and, so far as I can ascertain, peculiar to China. The bronze is some eighteen inches in length and eleven in depth.

If the Japanese have borrowed from the Chinese in bronze-casting, of which there is no proof, they seem to have nothing to learn from us. They not only give all the delicate moulding of the lotus-leaf—by some process unknown—but produce relief ornamentation by cutting the surrounding metal away, as Mr. Audsley has rightly pointed out. Such relieved work they further enrich with the burin, or damascene with gold and silver. Repoussé work is said to be known and practised by them, but I cannot say I have ever seen any clearly marked specimen. They are much in the habit of graving diaper and other patterns on bronzes, and filling them up with silver wire, with which they cover large surfaces in salvers or vases with good effect, and very original designs or patterns.

I cannot do better than make selection, as a subject of comparison, of a lotus-leaf and buds with seed-pod, in bronze, the work of a Japanese artist, of about similar size to the Chinese peach (Figs. 86 and 87, p. 174), showing a front and a back view. I have seen no more perfect specimen of bronze modelling or casting. The best characteristics of the leaf, naturally so graceful, have been preserved, with its undulating curves, and even the very texture of leaf and bud and pod, with veins and markings; while a perfectly modelled little frog sits on the half-folded young leaf coming from beneath. It is the very impress of the plant in its least-studied form transposed into metal, and to all appearance it must have been moulded on the leaf; but how effected, or in what material, it is hard to divine. It is a distinctive mark of Japanese work, and in this it asserts a laudable pre-eminence over Chinese productions, that although it is intended to present only one,—the upper and cup-like surface of the leaf to view,—the under surface (see Fig. 87, p. 174) is not less perfectly rendered. So much is this the case that it is difficult to avoid a feeling of regret in putting it down on the table, by which the reverse surface is out of sight; and my friend General Malcolm, who possesses a somewhat similar work in bronze, which I brought from Japan, has accordingly had it placed edgeways so as to show both surfaces at once.

In the same spirit is conceived a bronze candlestick (Fig. 88, p. 175), formed also out of the lotus-leaf and stalk. It stands ten inches high, and the seed-pod forms

the socket for the candle. The mythic tortoise, emblem

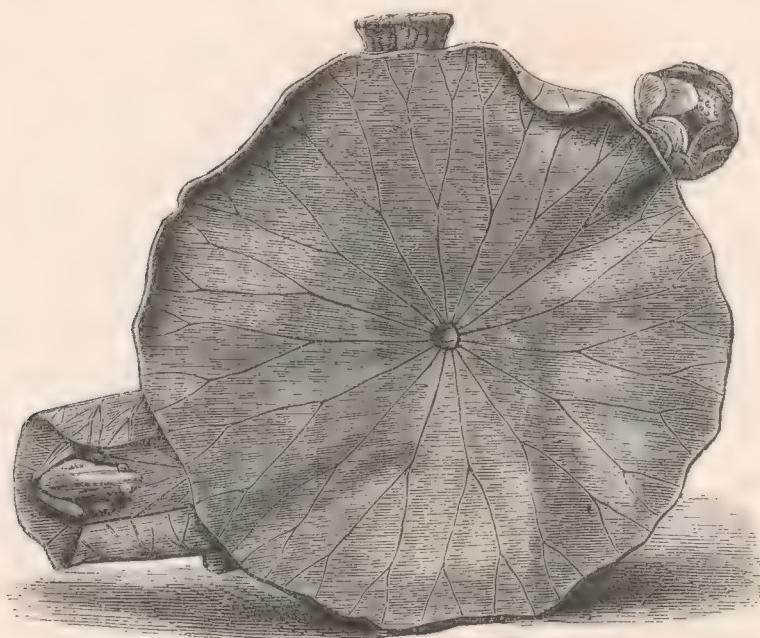


Fig. 86.

of longevity, is also here resting on the leaf, which forms

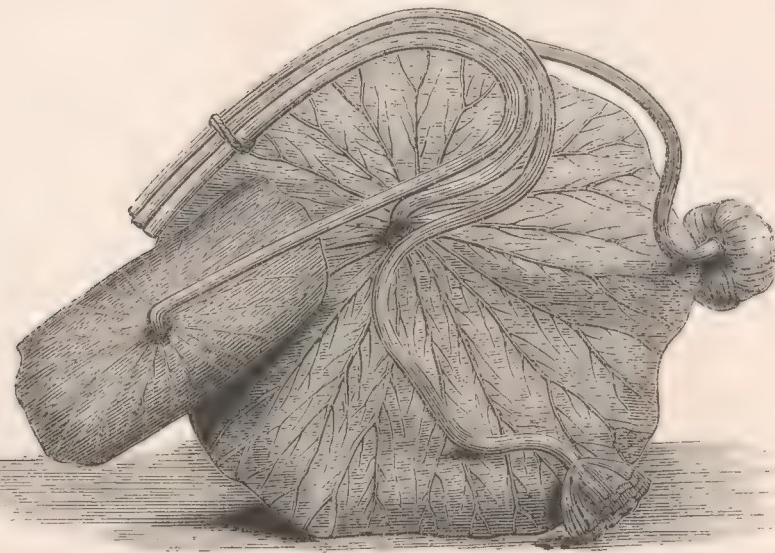


Fig. 87.

the base, while a snake curls round the stalks of the

plant. The casting is not so wonderful as in the larger



Fig. 88.

piece (Figs. 86 and 87), but nothing can well be more graceful in design.

Among the very best specimens of Japanese treatment of the figure in bronze, combining vigorous action and expression with excellence in the workmanship, which



Fig. 89.

I have seen, is the warrior represented in Figs. 89 and 90. The whole piece stands some three feet high, and is like in subject to St. George and the Dragon. The Japanese God of War, or some divinely descended warrior, has

been engaged in battle with a monster in semi-human shape, and he stands victorious over it with his foot on the prostrate body, preparing to give the *coup de grâce* with the sword in his right hand. This beautiful bronze is, I



Fig. 90.

believe, the property of a Dutch gentleman formerly resident in Japan, by whom it has been sent on loan to the South Kensington Museum.

The fancy of the Japanese is fertile in suggesting quaint or graceful adaptations of natural objects for practical

application to common uses. Fig. 91 may serve as an example. Here is a cobweb, with a bee entangled in its meshes, which is made to cover the hasp or latch on two halves of a sliding door, one half of the bronze remaining on the fixed leaf while the other is drawn away. The workmanship both of the web and the insects is very

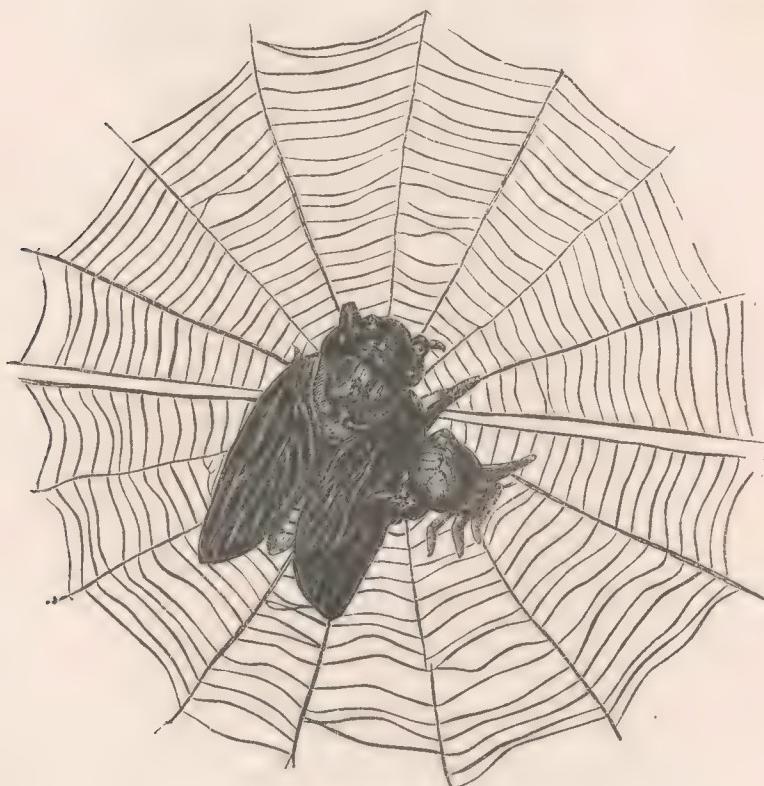


Fig. 91.

fine. I am indebted to Mr. Alt's collection for this specimen. I have, in my own possession, several equally ingenious and fanciful adaptations. Among others, an oblong gourd, with a few pine-leaves winding partially round, by the tendril of which it may be hung on a nail against the wall, so as to form a jar for flowers. Here (Fig. 92) is a dragon-like snake,

twisted into a pen-rest, to stand on a writing-table. A less gracefully conceived monster is represented in

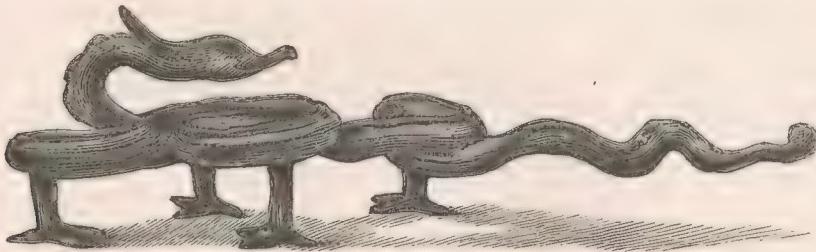


Fig. 92.

Fig. 93, intended to serve either as a weight or a pen-rest.

Fig. 94 shows a small bronze, which might have

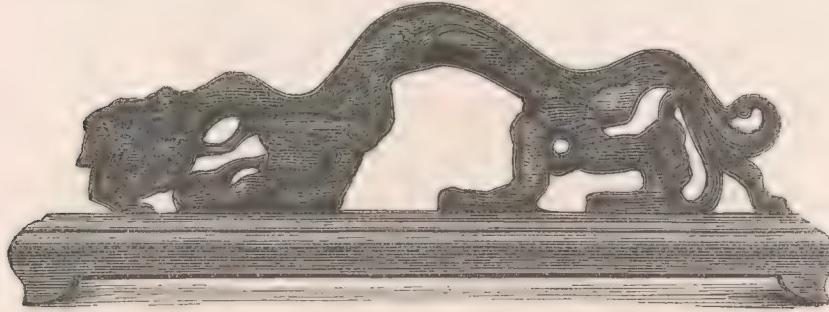


Fig. 93.

figured on some ancient Gothic cathedral, and is treated in a thoroughly conventional style.

I will only add one example more as a specimen of the

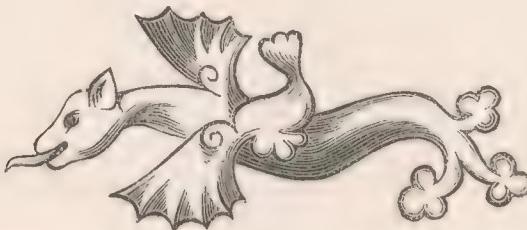


Fig. 94.

labour and elaborate workmanship the Japanese often bestow even on their utensils. Fig. 95 is taken from a

teapot of small dimensions, in bronze. It is covered with very exquisite *basso-relievo*s of the dragon, and a great



Fig. 95.

variety of patterns, while the legs are formed of three bottle-shaped gourds very gracefully adapted.

Before concluding I must add that however great the excellence attained by the Japanese in artistic working of metals, they do not always produce their best. There is a whole class of bronzes, generally large specimens, which in an artistic point of view are very inferior: clever as specimens of adroit casting, with great intricacy of leaves, and animals, and flowers, but without beauty, of which great numbers have found their way to Europe. I have just seen within the last few days, on the other hand, in the house of Mr. Darling, of the Ridge, near Hartfield, a pair of bronzes from Japan, representing a group of marine plants, chiefly the lotus, with birds and frogs, which are equally perfect in artistic design and execution, and of great beauty.



CHAPTER X.

ENAMELS AND CLOISONNÉS.

A N interesting account of the different kinds of enamel, and of the art of enamelling handed down to us from ancient times, might be written, but it could not properly find a place here. Every country, we know, had pottery of more or less perfection in the highest antiquity. From Egypt and Babylon and China; the countries inhabited by the Celtic races; from South America and Mexico, examples may be seen in the British Museum and elsewhere. The art of making glass must have followed much later, and whether it took its origin in Phœnicia or Egypt, we know from existing Greek and Roman specimens that vitrification had reached a high degree of excellence more than twenty centuries back. This knowledge of the ancients would by a natural process lead to the discovery of enamels, and the whole class of vitreous substances, either transparent or opaque, applicable alike to pottery, porcelain, and metals, and upon which the whole art of enamelling is based. From decorative pottery with glazing of vitreous composition, to porcelain, the transition would be easy, at whatever date it may have

actually taken place. The application of the same enamel material to metals may have been contemporaneous. The materials and processes may not have been so perfect or so various as those now employed, but yet essentially similar in kind. As regards the materials used and the processes of manufacture in Japan, I cannot go into much detail, and it is the less necessary as the writer of a "Catalogue raisonné" of the Liverpool Art Collection, which accompanied an exhibition of Japanese works of Art some time ago, entered very fully into the subject. It may not be irrelevant, however, if I give a description of what I saw in Peking as to the methods adopted when they were first seeking to recover the almost forgotten art of cloisonné enamel, now some twelve years ago. The art itself is undoubtedly of great antiquity, not only in China and Japan, but all over Asia and Europe. Little is known of its origin in any of its three forms, cloisonné, champlevé, or surface enamel painting; but most of the ancient nations were acquainted with the art of enamelling, and resorted to it for purposes of ornamentation in metal vessels, arms, and objects of personal adornment. Cloisonné would seem to furnish the most ancient specimens of enamel known. In absolute ignorance of its origin, it has been surmised to have been first introduced in the Eastern empire in the time of Justinian. We know that it was practised in his day, and down to the general decadence of Byzantine Art and empire together. That the Persians were not unacquainted with some process of enamelling during the sixth century, the

writer of the Catalogue says, we have proof. The cost and labour of all cloisonné enamel-work seems to have induced the abandonment of Art of this kind in Europe and Western Asia about the thirteenth century, and in still more recent times the same cause has prevailed to prevent its revival at Paris, after considerable effort and outlay had been incurred with that view.

In the “Catalogue raisonné” above referred to, there was a very good description of the characteristic differences between the Chinese and Japanese cloisonné, and they differ very widely, though not always. The writer says, in the Japanese “we observe grounds covered with delicate scroll-work, in metal lines, with small flowers and rosettes intermixed, masses of intricate diaper-work disposed in various ways, and medallions filled with geometrical devices, or dragons, birds, flowers, and such-like. Large masses of floral enrichment (not enclosed in medallions) seldom occur, but several specimens of this may be observed on important pieces in the present collection. The Chinese enamellers adopt a much bolder style of ornamentation, covering their works with large masses of leaves and flowers, peonies and water-lilies being amongst their most favourite objects. Such a treatment demanded less labour and skill than the Japanese methods, but produced works of a more striking character. In addition to this, the Chinese adopted a very brilliant system of colouring, freely using turquoise-blue, deep red, black and white ground, with the foliage in bright greens, and the flowers in nearly their natural tints.”

Of the different kinds of enamel-work, cloisonné is chiefly adopted by both Chinese and Japanese, though in different styles. The champlevé, where the pattern is cut out of the metal base, leaving the divisions in relief, and the enamel paste filling up the hollow or smaller portions, is less commonly adopted. Of translucent enamelling I do not know that I have seen any specimens in either country of undoubted authenticity; I mean where the metal is only delicately engraved upon with designs, and then covered with transparent coloured enamels, through which the engraved pattern is seen. A third kind of enamelling on metal, referred to in the above Catalogue, is occasionally resorted to in China and Japan, but is usually of a very common kind, and only applied to cheap ware; where the metal ground (usually cups, saucers, or plates of very thin substance) is covered with an opaque coating of enamel, upon which are painted with the brush, using enamel pigments, the various designs, subsequently fixed by the action of fire. The same kind of enamelling is practised in Europe, and is very similar to that which is seen on glass and porcelain.

The Japanese cloisonnés which have come to light since the revolution in Japan are miracles of delicate workmanship. I agree with the writer of the Catalogue that in this sense they are wholly unrivalled, and in them "manipulative skill has reached its climax;" while "we are still at a loss to understand by what means or methods the Japanese were able to produce these masterpieces." I think with him, that "master-

pieces they unquestionably are, for we do not hesitate to say that ten centuries of Western enamelling have failed to give us a tangible evidence of such perfection."

Enamel, I need hardly explain, is a name given to certain substances, transparent or opaque, which are coloured by metallic oxides, and so combined, that when ground down and mixed into a paste with volatile oils, they will fuse at a comparatively low temperature, and become vitreous. In reference to the costliness of the material, the same writer adds, "The transparent enamel is composed of silica, oxide of lead, lime, and soda fused together, and the opaque of similar materials with the addition of tin or bone earth." These, however, are merely the foundation as it were, for both kinds of paste are coloured by the addition of other oxides, many of them from the precious metals; as, for instance, purple enamel, which is procured by gold, yellow by silver, blue by cobalt, green by copper, violet by manganese, and other colours by combinations of these. But in the article from the *Times* of December 26, 1872, serving as a preface to the Catalogue, I believe a very fallacious test was given by which to distinguish the older and better specimens of Japanese—the former, it is stated, being always light in weight. With the Chinese, at all events, it is conspicuously the reverse—the modern imitations are more generally light and flimsy, while the ancient or older specimens are massive and weighty.

In the manufacture of cloisonné enamels, the opaque enamels are only used. The following is the process

as I observed it at Peking some years ago, when the demand in Europe for such articles first began to rouse the Chinese to exertions to recover what had virtually become a lost art. The foundation is usually of copper, fashioned to the shape of the article designed, whether a vase, a plaque, or a salver. This is generally of some substance varying from a tenth to an eighth of an inch, and upon this the pattern is soldered on, the cells varying in depth according to the value and excellence of the work. If merely intended as a cheap imitation of the fine old specimens, the object is to make the pattern little more than a mere tracery of wire, so as to require only a very thin layer of paste to fill up the intervening spaces. If, on the contrary, it is to be a true cloisonné, veritable cells are made, varying from one-sixth to one-eighth of an inch; into these, when the design is completed, the paste is carefully lodged by small wooden spatulas, according to the colour to be produced; and when this stage is completed, the article is passed into a primitive kind of oven, or muffle, built up in the courtyard, where it is fired until the paste is fused and converted into a vitreous substance, and then allowed very gradually to cool. Though carried out—as all things are in China and Japan—in a rough sort of fashion, and with the most primitive tools and contrivances, the process is evidently one requiring great delicacy, care, and judgment, as well as skilful manipulation and experience. Too much heat would injure the colouring, besides risking the melting of the copper partitions and founda-

tions, in which case the whole vase might come out misshapen, or the colours might become clouded or otherwise spoiled. Hence one element of costliness, for there is not only the original cost of material and skilled labour—in both directions considerable—but a certain risk of failure, when labour and material alike would be wholly lost. When the article is drawn from the furnace, if the enamel appear to have been successfully fused, it is carefully examined to fill up any inequalities with the enamel paste, and before it is passed to the hands of the polishers it may require several returns to the fire. The polishers carefully grind down all the irregularities, and make the surface as smooth as glass. It often happens, however, that air bubbles cover the surface to a considerable extent, and to polish these entirely out would not only entail a vast increase of labour, but eat away too great a depth of the enamel. When such air bubbles are so large or numerous as to be a positive disfigurement, the hollows must be filled up anew with paste, and the whole again subjected to the action of the fire. The less scrupulous of the manufacturers, however (as many of the earlier collectors in Peking found to their cost), discovered an easier method of deceiving the eye and concealing such defects, by filling up the depressions with coloured wax. The result may easily be imagined. After being packed, and after passing through the tropics, with more or less of friction, on their way to Europe, they came out of their retirement all blistered and seamed, as though they had

gone through an attack of small-pox, with great pits where the wax had melted away or fallen out. The bulk of these articles, which have been imported into Europe by shiploads during the last ten years, are modern; not all necessarily of this trumped-up and debased kind, but certainly inferior to the work of the centuries preceding—inferior in design, in carefulness of execution, and in colour, yet withal furnishing a striking example of the aptitude and enterprise of the Chinese, who could in a few short years so far recover an art which had been almost entirely lost, as to deceive all but experienced connoisseurs and the most practised eyes. Certainly Europe has produced nothing in this art to be compared with the best Chinese or Japanese cloissónés, either in the Middle Ages or in modern days, when the ambition of the French was fired to produce works of this nature to rival or excel them. M. Christophile, of Paris, I believe, devoted much time and money during a series of years for the attainment of this object; and although some very beautiful articles were exhibited two or three years ago here in the French Court at the International Exhibition, they were not equal in colouring or design to the originals they were intended to imitate. I understand that the revival of the art has been given up, having been found altogether too costly to pay as a matter of business.

Mr. Audsley says very justly that the “Japanese enamels are characterized by great sobriety of colouring, bright colours being sparingly used.” So sparingly,

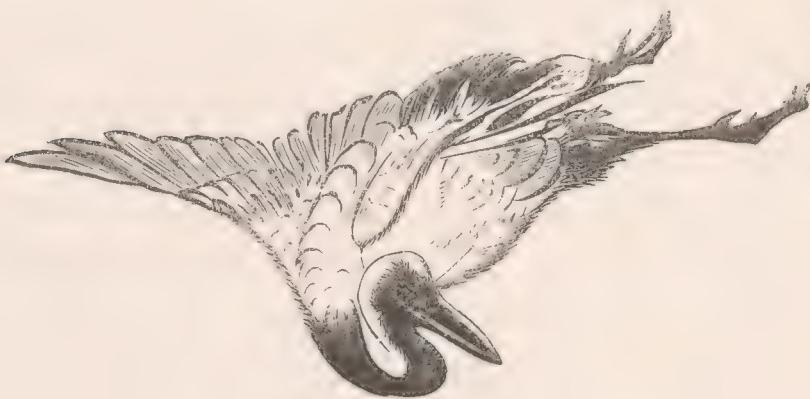
indeed, I would add, that they are conspicuous by their absence; and in this lies one of the chief differences between the works of China and Japan in enamel. In so far as I can judge, they rival each other in excellence of workmanship; but I think the Japanese unattractive and decidedly inferior in colour. Generally a dark and sombre green is adopted as the ground tint, although other colours—drab, lilac, and dark blue—are introduced sometimes in the variously designed medallions. Still the effect, to my eye, is monotonous and sombre. Their patterns are generally intricate and minute, small sprays, flowers, diapers, and geometrical figures all being laid under contribution, while leaves of various colours—drab, white, light green—are interspersed. These being minutely subdivided, it is impossible not to be struck with admiration at the marvellous delicacy of execution and fertility of invention, if not of imagination, displayed. Such works would be simply unproducible in any country where skilled workmanship of a high order, and artistic in kind, was not abundant and obtainable at an exceedingly low rate of remuneration. Many of their enamel works must represent the labour of years even for two or three hands. The colouring, if not very attractive to a lover of pure and bright hues, is always harmonious and effective, as Mr. Audsley remarks; but I am bound to say that some specimens now in the Exhibition at Paris excel anything I have seen in China, both in pure colour and richness of effect.

Of the three kinds of enamelling enumerated in the

Liverpool Catalogue, the cloisonné, the champlevé, and the painted, the Japanese, so far as I have seen, only cultivate the first two, unless that which is usually called lacquered porcelain may be considered as properly belonging to the last. Very often, however, the colouring matter laid on with lacquer is not burnt in at all, but may easily be rubbed off, and is only counterfeit enamel.

Mr. Audsley thinks the Japanese excel in this department "beyond any other nation with whose works we are acquainted." As works of Art, I have seen nothing Chinese to compare with two large jars in the Exhibition of Paris at this moment—either in manufacture, brilliancy of colour, or beauty of design. Except in very small articles, such as beads or clasps, it was rare, a few years ago, to see any large specimens in the shops of Yeddo or Yokohama. It is evident now, from the large number of objects which have found their way to this country in recent years, that it was an art which had become well-nigh obsolete in Japan as in China during the early part of the present century, and that what remained of works of this kind of an important nature must have been interred in the palaces and the *yashikis* of the Daimios. This will account for the fact referred to by Mr. Audsley, that in my former work I only made one incidental allusion to enamel. Some fifteen years ago none but small objects were in the market—very beautiful and perfect as indications of power in this direction, but insignificant in size and the number of specimens. Among

other specimens I obtained some enamelled beads, which, for delicacy of execution and perfection of workmanship, no less than for beauty of colour and design, are equal to the finest examples I have seen of any age or country. But, until the opening of the present Exhibition at Paris, all the larger works that had come under my notice—and there was a very fine collection on loan from Mr. Bowes in the South Kensington Museum a short time ago—seemed dull and tame in comparison with Chinese vases and salvers of similar importance. These were almost exclusively in minute diaper patterns, sometimes interspersed with dragons or flowers, geometric figures, and scrolls of marvellous minuteness and delicacy, but all of the most subdued colours. For the most part these works can scarcely be called cloisonné; the cells, or *cloisons*, are, I believe, merely formed by wire, and have no depth. They are only wire-work apparently fastened, on a copper foundation, in certain patterns, and a thin layer of enamel paste fills up the interstices, to be fixed by fire.



CHAPTER XI.

POTTERY — GLAZED, ENAMELLED, AND DECORATIVE
WARE—PORCELAIN—RANGE AND SPECIAL CHA-
RACTERS OF JAPANESE CERAMIC ART.

HOW far the faience pottery and porcelain industries of Japan may, in the first instance, have been their own invention, and not imported or borrowed, but only improved from age to age by communication with China, is not, perhaps, a very important question. According to Dr. Hoffman, who has given much study to the subject, the art of making porcelain was introduced into Japan in the year 27 B.C.; while in A.D. 1211 a great improvement took place through a Japanese potter, who, in company with a priest, visited the Chinese potteries, and brought back a knowledge of all their secrets. When Hoffman wrote, earlier in the century, little was known of the interior of Japan, and he described the principal factories as being located in the province of Fizen, in the island of Kiusiu, and occupying twenty-five villages on a mountain from which the materials were procured. But we now know that there have been from old date important manufacturers, both of porcelain and pottery, in many other

localities and provinces of Japan; indeed, not one of their Art industries is more widely spread. It is not my intention, however, to treat the ceramic productions of Japan in any great detail. Their great beauty and excellence are so generally acknowledged and appreciated, that they have been very largely imported here and elsewhere in Europe from the earliest intercourse of the Portuguese, and of the Dutch in the seventeenth century. The artistic designs are similar in many respects to those adopted in other materials, with the addition of colour, which, in Japanese hands, imparts not only a great value, but an element of beauty of the highest order. I am the less inclined to enter at any length into the characteristic merits of this branch of Japanese industry, because the very elaborate and beautifully illustrated work of Messrs. Audsley and Bowes on the "Keramic Art of Japan," now going through the press, leaves little to be added on the subject.

From the industrial or manufacturing point of view, I consider some of their fine, and especially their eggshell, porcelain equal, if not superior, to anything China has produced. In an Art aspect, having reference to their larger pieces and their ornamentation, I think the Chinese have in some points excelled them. To what extent or degree this superiority exists, however, I should hesitate to speak authoritatively. I am inclined to agree with Mr. Audsley, that the best and most artistic of the fictile wares of Japan, more especially faience, come from Satsuma, in the south-western part of the island of Kiusiu. There is certainly some-

thing very attractive in the delicate cream or vellum tint of the body of the ware, and the exceedingly fine crackle induced by the process of cooling the thick glaze has also a good effect. Such a softly toned ground is eminently adapted for the painting of birds, flowers, &c.; and the colouring is often fully in keeping, and very delicately finished, with a fine sense of harmony and contrast in effect.

There is so much in common in the porcelain and pottery of the two countries, that it is difficult to speak of them separately, and without a running commentary on their relative pretensions and merits. Baron Hübner, in his interesting work, speaks of both in this sense, and is disposed to give the palm to the Chinese for superior excellence. But it is a very difficult question to decide. They have both, I think, borrowed extensively from each other in times past, and both have exercised all the ingenuity, taste, and skill which are characteristic of each, to carry this particular Art industry to the highest degree of excellence.

How highly these products were valued in Europe when first they made their appearance may be seen in the costly and persistent efforts made alike by governments and individuals, at Dresden, Sèvres, Berlin, Chelsea, and Bristol, to discover the materials and the processes employed, and to produce similar works.

The credit of what may be termed this second discovery of the art of making hard porcelain—for the secrets of the Chinese and Japanese manufactories were never obtained—is claimed with more or less justice by

Dresden. It is generally attributed to a native of that place, John Böttcher, who, about 1706, after many experiments and failures, produced the first specimens, which were of a dark red colour. They are very rare, and were only ornamented by superadded gold or silver-smith's work. Later a fine white earth, or clay, seems to have been discovered, containing the chief ingredients, it is supposed, of the Chinese *kaolin*, or *kau-ling* (the Chinese for "high ridge," and the name of a hill near *Jau-chau-foo*), from which they derived the disintegrated granite employed. It is said to be nearly pure feldspar, or such as contains no metallic substance. The colours used on the fine hard paste which resulted from this basis, mixed with other ingredients, had long been admired in Europe, without the power of imitating them. De Guignes made many vain endeavours to procure samples and learn the mode of mixing them. With some difficulty I succeeded in 1850 in obtaining a large collection of these, and forwarded them to the Government at home, but I am not aware that they were ever utilised. Probably at that date there was not much to be learned from this source, and most of the beauty we admire in the colours is due to the processes adopted in their application by the native workmen. These were always jealously guarded as secrets, and handed down in the craft from generation to generation; but unfortunately they and the workmen disappeared together in the Taeping rebellion which swept over nearly all the provinces like a tidal wave, from 1850 to 1864, and destroyed everything before it, devastating town and

country alike. The great porcelain manufactories were ruined, the workmen carried off as soldiers or killed, and with them the skill, the traditions, and the secrets of ages disappeared. Whether the Chinese will ever recover what was then lost, and restore the industry to its former excellence, is a matter of doubt. In Europe, after the discovery of a sea route to China round the Cape, and when direct communication became continuous and constant, Chinese porcelain excited the greatest admiration. It is an old story that Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony, took such deep interest in the new Art industry, that he gave an Emperor of Russia a regiment of dragoons, completely equipped, in exchange for twenty-two of the large vases still to be seen in the Dresden collection, and which used to form the chief attractions of the "Japanese Palace" on the banks of the Elbe. Under such high patronage rapid progress was made by a succession of directors, after Böttcher, who died early, and, according to Marryat, was not saved by his enthusiasm for Art from intemperate habits.

In 1731 such advances had been made, that, under Kändler, medallions with wreaths, flowers, Watteau figures, and animals, and also the modelling in relief of figures and other objects, laid the foundation of what has long been more especially known as Dresden china. Out of the 90,000 pieces said to be in the Dresden collection (which has been lately moved from the Japan Palace to a newly built museum, the Johanneum, in the "Neu-markt"), there are many interesting specimens of

earlier Chinese and Japanese ware, both porcelain and pottery. Some of the former are very large and valuable, including the twenty-two given for a regiment of dragoons, while many others are common ware and valueless, save in a chronological point of view, and the collection fails in this, from the absence of any authentic dates and from defective arrangement.

Oriental china, as we now know, is composed of a natural product supposed to be produced by the decomposition of feldspar, and *pe-tun-tse*, a compound of feldspar, quartz, and a steatitic mineral. These materials are prepared by grinding and washing, and finally mixed to form the clay of which porcelain is made. The Great Ming Dynasty, about A.D. 1370, is generally cited as the period when porcelain first began to be decorated with flowers and buds in rich enamel colours. In this dynasty, extending to the middle of the seventeenth century, porcelain seems to have been brought to its greatest perfection in China. But when porcelain was first made is not known.

Gilding, the writers on Oriental porcelain say, was not introduced before the *Jouen* dynasty, and was perfected in the *Tching-hoa* period (1465 to 1487). The very thin porcelain called eggshell is said to have been invented in the *Yong-lo* period (1403 to 1424), and the finest in the *Tching-hoa* period. The white pieces of the *Wan-li* period (1573 to 1619) are the most celebrated. The *Siaacn-te* period is celebrated for its porcelain, which is held to be the finest produced during the *Ming* dynasty, and of the greatest artistic value (1426 to 1435). These

dates were laboriously collected by Stanislas Julien, and given in his work on Chinese porcelain. The blue and white porcelain (Nankin), so named after the port from which it was shipped, was made at *Kin-te-chin*, in *Kiang-si*, the site of the imperial factories for a period of more than eight centuries.

Such dates and general notes on epochs in the manufactories of China are not wholly without utility in aiding collectors to form some idea of the age or period to which the older specimens belong. Unfortunately, forging of marks, and counterfeit productions of celebrated periods, are by no means unknown in China, any more than in Europe.

The Jesuit Fathers are said to have introduced the fashion of painting subjects in medallions at a time when they were much patronised at the court of Peking by Kanghi. I have in my possession a set of three jars, of this period, I believe, of great beauty, with medallions on each side, and the whole intervening space elaborately covered with exquisitely painted flowers.

The history of Japanese porcelain and pottery, so far as it can be traced, shows plainly, I think, that China and Japan borrowed and stole from each other whatever secrets and models they could, and that upon more than one occasion workmen passed from the one to the other.

The Japanese are much given to lacquering their china, but I cannot say I have ever seen any specimens, however costly, which seem deserving of great admiration. Some of their smaller and more delicate

pieces, in which a few touches only of lacquer mingle with other and more legitimate decorative processes, have more merit than their larger pieces, where the whole or considerable surfaces are covered. By far the most precious results of perfect taste with delicacy of touch are to be found in some of their cheapest and commonest ware. Small teacups, bowls, and saucers in porcelain, and still more common forms of pottery, are real works of Art. Of the latter many specimens are twisted into fanciful forms of leaf or flower, often with the mark of the thumb and finger left, which are worthy of all admiration. These are usually formed in a dark clay, not very hard baked, and ornamented with a flower or spray on one side overlapping the edge. These are glazed and burnt in so as to form an enamel, and furnish as perfect an example of the Art capacity of a Japanese workman of the humblest class as can be found in any direction. I have a few of these as specimens, picked up often by chance, while walking through the streets in Japan or visiting the stalls of the vendors of pottery and miscellaneous objects, which I would not exchange for many more costly pieces of china ware.

I cannot close this short notice of Japanese pottery and faience without referring to the Doulton ware, and the beautiful collection prepared for the Paris Exhibition, lately on view at the Lambeth manufactory. And I do so the more gladly because I recognise in the perfection to which Mr. Doulton, with the group of workmen he has gathered about him, has carried his

work in producing a new form of Art pottery, that he has followed very closely in the lines of the Japanese, and attained his success by similar means as those to which they owe their great excellence. The chief merit of this new ware, in my eyes, is the fact that the creator of the Industry has known how to give to the coarsest clay, previously only used for such products as blacking bottles and drain pipes, an artistic as well as a utilitarian value which will enable it to vie with the more costly material of the finest porcelain. He has not only effected this with the greatest success, but he has had the courage to trust to the artistic value of his decorative treatment of the coarse material for the reward of all his labours, by refusing to mould any of his works, so that no two are ever produced alike. All being handwork at the potter's wheel, each object obtains the impress of an individual mind and hand, to which is due, as I have pointed out, the great charm of Japanese fictile ware. Of course, when an attractive design has been conceived and once wrought out in clay, nothing would be easier than to multiply the same at a cheap rate by moulding. And as the same rule is adopted for the decoration of all this ware, and the glaze being produced by the vitrification, not of any fresh surface, but of the salts in the original clay, the sharpness of outline and the touch of the workman remain unimpaired, while the intensity of heat required for the process renders it practically indestructible. Of the artistic merit of the decorative portions of this ware, independently of their form, it is difficult to speak

in too high terms of praise. I believe this is greatly due to the talent of two artists, Miss Barlow and Mr. Timworth, who often work conjointly on the same piece. Some of the articles—vases and plates—are covered with incised drawings of animals of the most spirited kind, the result of studies from the life at the Zoological Gardens and elsewhere, which show not only great power, but that intense sympathy with Nature to which the Japanese owe so much of their success. The decorative designs of *pâte sur pâte* are full of originality and graceful composition, and their application is not limited to ornamental vases of every description, but equally enrich, with an artistic value, an infinite variety of other objects—jugs, drinking-cups and pitchers, garden fountains, flower-pots, in short, almost everything into which clay can be moulded. Mr. Timworth, who has sedulously laboured to achieve this great success, and with an exuberance of fancy, has produced, among other things, a spiral fountain like a Tower of Babel, every story of which exhibits groups of figures and animals artistically treated. Whether the Doulton ware or the Lambeth faience be examined, the same originality, and so to speak individuality in the work is easily recognised. Although only of a few years' growth, the Art pottery and faience industry at Lambeth must, as may be seen by the results, have already created a school of its own, and gathered round this centre of production a whole group of artists and enthusiastic pupils. How much of this may be due to the influence of Japanese Art, and

the numerous objects brought over to this country, I will not say. But I think it may safely be concluded that much is to be attributed to this cause.

There is one form of Art Industry not yet alluded to which occupies a middle place between metals and porcelain—that is, *cloisonné* on porcelain. The Japanese have carried this to great perfection, and many very perfect specimens are now to be seen in the Paris Exhibition.



CHAPTER XII.

IVORY AND WOOD CARVING—NÉTSUZKÉS.

THERE is nothing more remarkable," observes an Edinburgh Reviewer, in an article on Dr. Schliemann's Trojan Antiquities, "in the case of all half-civilised nations, whether in ancient or modern times, than the skill they display in working in gold or silver, as compared with their attainments in any other respect. And while the articles which compose the treasure display a considerable amount of technical skill in their manufacture, it can hardly be said that they possess any trace of *Art* in the higher sense of the word."

If this be true of the earlier forms of civilisation and of half-civilised nations, it certainly does not apply to the Japanese, although their civilisation may never have ranked very high in European eyes. They have no jewellery, to begin with. They neither wear nor make any; and in that are more civilised, perhaps, than some Western nations who are further advanced in the intellectual culture and scientific attainments which pertain to superior civilisation. They work very little in the precious metals, either for

personal ornament or decoration. They put all their best work on the most valueless materials, and have attained rare excellence in the artistic manipulation of the commoner metals, such as iron, copper, bronze, and various amalgams of these. But they give an impress of Art and masterly design, as well as execution, to all that leaves their hand in these common materials, whether for purposes of decoration or utility.

If they thus succeed in metals, it follows of necessity that they should show at least the same mastery over softer and more plastic materials. Accordingly their carved work in ivory and wood is very perfect of its kind. Mr. Audsley, in his "Notes on Japanese Art," very truly observes:—

"Of all the carved work of the Japanese, the most wonderful and interesting are their ivories called *nétsuzkés*. These consist of groups of figures and animals, grotesque figures and representations, in short, of nearly every natural object in Japan, most truthfully rendered. It is quite impossible to give any idea in words of the quaint humour, the broad caricature, the intense power of expression, and the general artistic excellence which stamp every *nétsuzké* in which the human form appears with an individuality distinct from anything of a kindred nature produced in other lands. A first-rate Japanese *nétsuzké* has positively no rival."

The admiration here expressed for the finer specimens of ivory-carving is fairly justified by the artistic excellence of such works. Whether they take wood or ivory for their material, the result is equally admirable. In a

recent visit to the Museum at Munich, I examined closely the unrivalled collection of ivory carvings in the fifteenth room, with a view to test the comparative excellence of the Japanese and the best European artists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The works of the latter are there in great variety—statuettes, goblets with basso-relievos, Bacchanalian groups by Rugermayer and Elhafen, children by Fiamingo, and many other samples of the carver's art of rarest beauty. Undoubtedly the Japanese could produce no groups of nude figures equally perfect in composition, drawing, and skilful modelling; but only, I think, because they have never studied the nude with that view, and have been content with the happy grouping of draped figures, when combined with forcible expression both in attitude and features. In this they can hold their own against the world, though distanced in the higher Art. Like most other things in Japan, as in China, we must go back to a past era for the best examples of wood and ivory carving. The general degeneration is too manifest to admit of any question. To what causes are we to trace such deterioration? In Japan the sudden demand of foreigners has carried out of the country all that was best worth possessing in nétsuzkés and other objects, while it has unfortunately stimulated the production of very inferior work—all the more certainly that the caterers for the European market have not, as a rule, been very competent judges of the artistic merit of the articles offered for sale. The late revolution, also, by altering the costume of the privileged classes and suppressing or im-

poverishing the Daimios, who were the great patrons of the best Art, has contributed to the failure of all native demand for the more choice work, since the small ivories and metal brooches are no longer worn as ornaments on the person. I have a few of the best of these, carefully chosen on my first arrival in the country some seventeen



Fig. 96.

years ago, before foreigners had become domiciled, or were permitted to buy native products, except at Nagasaki. They are admirable in every respect as works of Art, some equally excellent in design and execution, and nearly all illustrative of something national and characteristic—in costume, traditions, or habits.

The largest and finest of these ivory carvings (Fig. 96)

is four inches in height, and represents a group of two figures—an old man and a woman, the latter holding a broom up which a tortoise is creeping, and the former a rake. The faces present a jubilant expression, very perfectly rendered. The composition and drapery are equally artistic, and the whole is emblematic of longevity and happiness, personated in an aged couple and the tortoise. It bears the signature of a celebrated carver of a past generation. There is in this group an expression of conscious mutual harmony, a sort of conjugal concord, with a sense of domestic welfare and comfort, shared with each other. There is even something beyond, as an Art critic has observed to me—"an air of *Behaglichkeit*, a quiet moral and physical serenity such as is found between people who have loved each other peacefully and long. From these two figures I imagine that the Japanese have a sense of home love, of family love, and can express it. The artist who sculptured these figures could have written or felt 'John Anderson my Jo.'" I quite agree with him, and think it the more noteworthy because I believe the Japanese are deficient in the sentiment of love, as we understand it—a mixture of worship, sympathy, and passion.

It was some time before I could obtain any intelligible account of the story attaching to this nétsuzké, and only succeeded at last by the aid of H. E. Wooyeno Kagenori, the Japanese Minister now accredited to the Court of St. James's. The legend runs thus:—In the fifth year of Yenki, and 1,565th year after the coronation

of the first Emperor of Japan, during the reign of Godaigo, a certain Kino Tsuraguki presented his Majesty with a book of poetry, entitled "Kokinshu," or "The Ancient and Modern Collection," in the preface of which the following lines appeared:—"Tagasago Saminoye no-matsa-mo ai-oi noyon i aboye;" literally, "The pine-tree of Tagasago and that of Saminoye appear to be in a similar state of existence." The Japanese interpretation of which may be rendered thus: "It is hoped that the great prosperity and immortal happiness which have always been enjoyed from the earliest time to the present reign may be continued—that is, everlasting as the leaves of a pine-tree." These verses, thus runs the tale, became so popular that various interpretations, conveying exaggerated ideas among the people, widely prevailed. The following is one of the most popular legends:—"When Tomonari, the Shinto priest of Asonomiya, in the province of Higo, was one day on a visit to the coast of Takasago, he happened to meet an old couple, supposed to be the spirits of the pine-tree, who were at work under one, with broom and rake. The old white-haired couple then explained the enigma of Tagasago Saminoye." This incident was subsequently described in poetry and painted in pictures, and is even to this day represented on the stage with music, and sung as a prayer for the gift of long life. If this should seem to the reader in the West but a slender foundation for a popularity surviving the lapse of more centuries than most nations can count in their history, the fact of its existence is not the less interesting and illustrative of

the people who find in some enigmatic verses and the apologue, an inspiration which produces some of their choicest works of Art.

Fig. 97 represents a fisherman leaning over a large basket, from which a tortoise is emerging. Here there is the same joyous face, expressive of exuberant glee, and the excellence of the execution is worthy of the design. This is on the same scale as the last, but,



Fig. 97.

from the half-stooping posture of the figure, it only stands three inches high.

Fig. 98, a group in the ancient costume of the Mikado's Court, represents two figures seated, one on a lower level than the other, making a pyramidal composition of excellent design. The execution is inferior to the preceding, but, notwithstanding this, the expression of the two faces is very good and characteristic.

One of the figures is beating a drum at some scene of rejoicing.

Fig. 99 represents another group of two figures, the



Fig. 98.

warriors of a former age, when there were Kami, personages of a semi-divine nature, who, like the great Norse sea-kings, or the heroic characters of the Niebelungen,



Fig. 99.

fill a large place in the mythic and early history of the Japanese. The expression of both faces, and the contrast between them, as well as the action of the figures, are quite dramatic.

The next group carries us into the mythic region altogether. Fig. 100 consists of two figures, seated, representing the Thunder God and his son repairing the drum by which the artillery of the skies is made to play. This is very finely carved, and the grim yet



Fig. 100.



Fig. 101.

grotesque expression of both faces is rendered in a way to remind us of the best productions of the Gothic era in the gargoylees and diableries of the cathedrals. Fig. 101 represents the same action by a single figure, and, if the

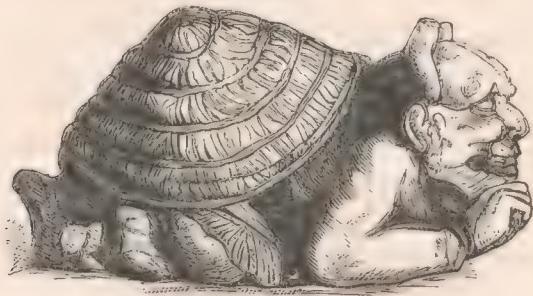


Fig. 102.

three faces and figures are compared, it will be seen with what variety of expression the Japanese invest their mythic creations. Fig. 102 is another of the same class —a gnome of the Caliban type crouching under a shell. This refers to an ancient custom of clearing the house

of evil spirits by a shower of scorching peas. In anticipation of the burning missiles, he has crept under a shell, using it as a shield of defence. The face is both evil and grotesque in its expression, and well responds to the popular idea of their Satanic spirits. Fig. 103 is taken from a very small but exquisite piece of ivory-carving, representing a lotus-leaf, bud, and frog, all executed with the greatest delicacy of touch and feeling. The whole of these are good examples of vigour and artistic execution.

I had marked a series of a different style, illustrating some of the Japanese superstitions, and showing how

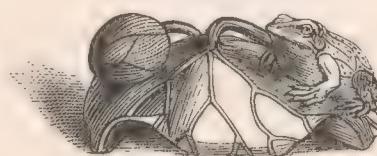


Fig. 103.

they embody many of their philosophic and religious speculations on the existence of evil, not only in the visible world, but, as they conceive, in the realm of the invisible equally. I must be content, however, with a few words of description only.

One represents a snail, a frog, and a snake on the top of a fungus or toadstool—the moral being, that the frog eats the snail; the snake, in its turn, eats the frog; but there is that in the snail that is fatal to the snake, and so the vicious circle is always being renewed. In another the elements are the same, but the base is a rock with leaves, and it bears the monogram of a celebrated artist.

Illustrative of the popular creed regarding a future life, another set is full of interest in a psychological and religious aspect. One represents a skull with a skeleton grasshopper seated upon it. Another, a fellow to it, is a skull with a snake protruding through the eyeless sockets, pointing to one of the articles of their faith that there is punishment in a future life and "a worm that dieth not" in reserve for evil-doers in this world. Many more of these, some in ivory and others in wood, of fine execution, I collected myself as opportunity offered while residing in the country. Some are curiously in accordance with the views of purgatory and a future state, as taught in the Roman Church. There is a group, representing a scene in purgatory, where the skeletons of a father and his child are represented as wolves (or ghouls in that form) devouring and gnawing the bones of other skeletons near them. Those of the Japanese who have faith in a future life believe that there are two distinct places, one for the good and another for the wicked, where the souls enter into a new body to suffer punishment, or enjoy reward for their past life. In the popular creed there are one hundred and sixty-three different places of punishment, eight of which are more severe than the rest. They believe, however, with the Romanists, that the souls of the departed may be saved from eternal punishment by the prayers or good deeds of the surviving relatives, who generally hope they may arrive at this end by giving fees to temples and priests, or by undertaking pilgrimages to sacred places. Thus the creed taught by the

Buddhist *bonzes*, and by which the temples profit, is not very different in these particulars from the tenets and practices of the Roman and Greek Churches. Here is another group, representing the husband and son departed from this life, while the widowed wife and mother remains behind to mourn for them. While she is thus engrossed with thoughts of the departed, their spirits, represented by their skeletons, are hovering round her, though she is unconscious of their presence. Longfellow has expressed a similar idea in the lines so pathetically quoted by Livingstone in his Diary when, near his end, and alone in the dismal swamps of Central Africa, his thoughts flew back to his children and friends:—

“I shall look into your faces,
And listen to what you say,
And be often very near you
When you think I’m far away.”

Another group represents the spirit of a mother who meets her departed son, after having summoned him by striking on his father’s skull with a bone.

One of the most strange and ghastly of these renderings of popular superstitions is a group representing a feast of the dead. They are amusing themselves in Hell, or Hades, by drinking *saki*, the usual intoxicating beverage of the people; while ghosts and goblins serve the table. Here, in another, is a skeleton saying his prayers and beating a skull, instead of the *Mokéi-gio*, an instrument commonly used in temples for the orisons of the priests. Some of these nétsuzkés had immense

additional value attached to them, in Japanese eyes, by the monograms of celebrated artists, such as Nimbo, Hogioku, and others who were carvers of great renown—"old masters" in their art.

It would be easy to select from the nearly inexhaustible store a series which should form a history of the religions, legends, and customs of the nation, though it might be difficult to obtain from the Japanese themselves a reliable explanation of many. One group before me represents the god and patron of commerce, Tebisu, writing the character *Dai* (large) on the account-book, whilst the god of riches is assisting him by rubbing the Indian-ink. This nétsuké is, or was—for superstitions, as well as costumes, are liable to change—usually worn by merchants, because supposed to carry with it good fortune and gain in all the transactions of the wearer. Another of Daigoku, the god of riches, represents him exhibiting his treasures to a small child. Here is a bad devil being tamed by a charming young lady, carved by the artist Linsa. Celebrated pictures of the same subject are to be seen, I am told, in the village of Lerake, near Kuto, showing that the popular faith in the power of woman to tame the rebel spirit in man is at least as common in Japan as in Europe.

Another is a reproduction of the story of a portentously long-legged man crossing a river with another on his shoulders, whose arms match the abnormal legs of the other—the moral being, that one good turn deserves another; for round the feet of the long-legged is an

octopus, from which he is being delivered by the long arms of the dwarf he is carrying out of charity on his back.

Lastly, I must speak of a group of five figures carved out of a single block—a quarrel of blind beggars. The principal figure has his fingers caught between the teeth of one whom he is preparing to fell to the ground with his staff; but this, in turn, is held fast by a third, who is under his feet, and a fourth is clasping his legs. I have seen no finer specimen of Japanese Art, and it would bear comparison with some of the best ivory-carving in Europe, in this or any age; but a series of drawings from different points of view would be necessary to give any fair idea of the artistic treatment of the group.

This was in Mr. Alt's valuable collection, recently on view at the Bethnal Green Museum, together with many illustrations of the popular idea of a future life, in finely carved nétsuzkés. One represents a skeleton dancing to the music of a singing-girl, playing on the banjo, or Japanese guitar. One foot rests on her fan, as if to show the unsubstantiality of this most grotesque presentment of a ghastly dance of Death; while the other is lifted in the performance of a caper, with one hand raised to the head and the other holding a fan. Both figures are admirable in their carving and expression, but the action of the dancing skeleton is worthy of Holbein, and might figure in his "Dance of Death." Another represents a skeleton seated with a lotus blossom in his right hand, and his left encircling a skull as large as the whole figure. A somewhat

similar one in wood is in my own collection, only in this the skeleton, especially the head, is treated in a more conventional way, and it is in the act of beating the *Mokéi-gio* used in the temples by the *bonzes* while reciting the prayers, to produce a sort of drumming monotonous accompaniment. A group in ivory, representing the headlong course of a mounted warrior riding through the sea, is also excellent in action and execution.

These brief notices may help those who have not had many opportunities of examining nétsuzkés of the finer kind, to form some idea of their more characteristic features and the subjects they illustrate. In this class of work I believe the Japanese have never been excelled.



CHAPTER XIII.

LACQUER WARE, WALL-PAPERS, TEXTILE FABRICS, AND EMBROIDERY.

IN writing on “Japanese Art,” however cursorily, it is impossible to leave unnoticed the lacquer ware. Some of the most admirable and highly finished articles produced by the artists of the country are in lacquer. The styles adopted and the processes employed are very numerous, with proportionately varied effects, yet all have some great beauty to recommend them. In none of their Art industries is greater delicacy, finish, or perfection of detail to be observed. It is all decorative Art, but decoration of a kind of which the Japanese may truly be said to have the monopoly and the secret. Whether they or the Chinese should have the credit of having originated this kind of industry is not clear. Judging by the fact that we in Europe first knew it as coming from Japan,—hence the term “Japan ware,” just as porcelain has always been called “China”—there is a presumption of priority in favour of the Japanese, independently of the fact that no other nation has attained in this material the same degree of excellence up to the present day. It is impossible to

convey by engravings any idea of the beauty of effect, because that depends in no small degree on the polish of the surface, the brilliancy and harmony of superimposed colours, and variety of textures forming either pictures or basso-relievos, together with the refined delicacy of touch displayed in the work. Mr. Audsley speaks of one cabinet in the collection of Mr. James L. Bowes, in which he thinks he can distinguish nine distinct species of lacquers, and twenty-four different modes of artistic treatment, together with sixteen different modes of applying and decorating gold-work, and seven ways of treating various metals. I must confess that I have no pretension to such discriminative power, although many specimens of their best work in cabinets and other objects are in my possession, and many more have been under my eye. I have seen the work going on also in its various stages, both in China and Japan. It consists in laying on successive layers of the varnish collected from the sap of the "Urishi" tree, the fruit of which produces the vegetable wax; and these are variously coloured by careful manipulation in the fining processes it undergoes in its liquid state before it is ready for use. Gold and other metals and colouring matters are sometimes mingled with, and at others applied on the surface, as the designs are elaborated, but all, I believe, in a liquid state. There is infinite variety in the value which the Japanese themselves attach to specimens, according to the fineness of the varnish employed, and the time that has elapsed since the work was completed, as the varnish

acquires by age a vitreous hardness. Of course the quality of the design and artistic treatment enters also largely into the question of value. The name of a distinguished painter in lacquer who lived in the thirteenth century is still handed down as the founder of a particular school of Art in lacquer-painting. Some of the distinct differences and excellences strike any cultivated eye ; but, as a rule, the discrimination applied by Japanese connoisseurs is, in great degree, unattainable without long practice and special study. In 1862 I sent home to the International Exhibition specimens of all kinds, some of very ordinary workmanship for common use, and others not of recent manufacture, as fine as I could obtain on rare occasions. At the close of the Exhibition the bulk of the objects in the "Japan Court" were left to be sold (having been collected chiefly for the Exhibition and as a means of instruction), and I was more amused than surprised to find, that nearly all the common specimens of lacquer ware sold rapidly, while very few persons were disposed to pay the cost price of the finest and most valuable.*

The principles of surface ornamentation adopted by the Japanese can nowhere be better seen than in their lacquer ware ; for in none of their work is such fertility of invention shown. Diapers are constantly resorted to for the covering of large surfaces, and often many different patterns appear in unsymmetrically shaped divisions on the same article, and are left within com-

* There is a lacquer screen of great beauty now in the Paris Exhibition, valued at 65,000 francs.

plete or zigzag edges. Fig. 104 is an example taken from the drawers of a miniature ivory and lacquer cabinet. Contrary to their usual habit, the artist here has continued the same design or pattern on all three, and obtained the indispensable variety by irregularity in the disposition of similar portions, leaving the edges free.

The introduction of medallions with separate and independent designs, and the embedding or inlaying of

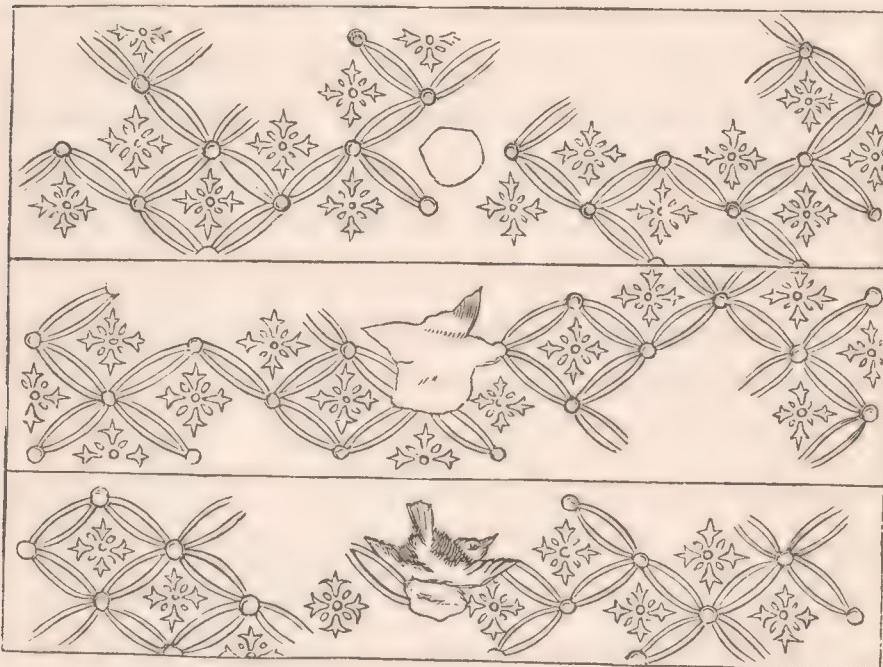


Fig. 104.

pearl, ivory, or thin plates of silver or gold, and sometimes coral or precious stones, add greatly to the cost of production, since successive layers of varnish, up to the desired level, have to be laid on, and each allowed to dry before the whole can be polished—both the ground and the relief—with infinite pains and delicacy. The harmonizing of these multifarious colours, patterns, materials, and designs—an object very generally and

perfectly effected—is simply a marvel of artistic excellence and power. The Chinese have never approached them in this, but, on the contrary, generally produce the teaboard style of ornamentation, with which we are only too familiar, commonly known as “Canton lacquer ware,” where the art, such as it is among them, is chiefly located. I only know one exception to this in a family resident at Foochow. It is said they have had for successive generations some of the secrets of the Japanese Art in lacquer, derived from Japan in the first instance by one of their ancestors, and, in consequence, are able to approach much more nearly, both in the quality of the lacquer and the designs, to their original teachers. At Soochow there used also to be a superior class of lacquer ware produced, before that once wealthy and populous city was reduced to a heap of ruins by the Taepings and Imperialists alternately. The foundation is commonly wood—that is, the object to be lacquered is made of a fine-grained light wood, generally pine, I believe. All roughnesses are carefully removed before the first coat of lacquer, and after each coat the same process is gone through of smoothing any roughness or inequalities by a lump of coarse charcoal. Layer after layer is thus added four or five times before the object is ready for any design or decorative process. But in the finest work as many as ten or twelve successive coats are given—hence one item of cost.

Of the special Foochow lacquer I obtained several good examples as to workmanship when on the spot, but of late years they have unfortunately been tempted

to work after European designs, furnished by foreign amateurs, and the result is a hybrid production, neither distinctly Japanese, Chinese, nor foreign, but a compound of all three, and wanting in the best characteristics of each. In the ornamentation of their lacquer the Japanese show a wonderful fertility of invention,



Fig. 105.

and, as a rule, they produce designs which never would enter into the imagination of European craftsmen or artists. Fig. 105 may be taken as one example. It is a tray, some twelve inches square, of very fine old lacquer, with a slightly curved edge; part of a set which, I have no doubt, originally formed the fittings of one of those

ancient cabinets of rarest workmanship only made for the wealthier Daimios and great princes of the empire. It almost defies analysis or description ; but the *motive*, so to speak, is the fir-cone and needles of the pine in the two corners ; and the rest is scroll-work and arabesque. The ground is a dark reddish brown, and the pattern is traced in various subdued colours to harmonize. It must represent the labour of weeks of a skilled hand, and would be costly, therefore, in any land, apart from its age. Whether such artistic work as the finer specimens of lacquer of a past day would ever again be produced seemed to be more than doubtful, until the display in the present Exhibition in Paris dispelled the fear. The race of feudal princes and of nobles of the Mikado's Court is ceasing to exist, and, with them, the patrons and promoters of all the more costly work in metal, lacquer, and enamel. The wealth of the country may increase with the new impulse to develop its resources, but with the spirit of innovation, new tastes and multiplied wants have also come, giving a different employment for riches, and creating other tastes for their enjoyment. If such is to be the result, something of beauty and excellence will pass out of the world, to make room, it may be, for more useful work ; but the lover of the beautiful and of originality in Art cannot fail to regard the change with a feeling of deep regret. I have a small cabinet in my possession, a gift of the present Mikado, so beautiful in all its parts—material, design, and execution vying with each other to make a perfect work—that I am sure the best

and most skilled hands employed in producing the *objets de Paris*—charming evidences as these afford of artistic taste and skill of hand—or the most deft of the Art manufacturers of Vienna, Berlin, or Florence, could not match it by any effort, single or combined, if the very same materials were supplied to their hand.

That I may not be deemed too much carried away by enthusiastic admiration of what is excellent, to form a just and sober estimate of the artistic value of such work, I will quote the testimony of Dr. Dresser, a thoroughly competent judge, who has only lately returned from an extensive professional tour in Japan, which he made for the express purpose of studying the Art processes of that country, and bringing home a collection of the best and most characteristic works. In his lecture at the Society of Arts,* he begins his remarks on this subject by observing that “perhaps the most beautiful art of Japan is the lacquer manufacture,” and referring to some specimens which were on the table, he added, “Some of these are very old, and all have merits, while for delicacy of treatment, attention to detail, and exquisite finish, some are unequalled by any works, so far as I know, that any other people have produced.” It is some further confirmation of this estimate that both in Japan itself, and now in Europe, the value of all the best and oldest lacquer, always high, has greatly increased of late years. Dr. Dresser

* See “Lecture on the Art Manufactures of Japan, from Personal Observation,” by Christopher Dresser, Ph.D., F.L.S. Printed in *Journal of Society of Arts* for February 1, 1878.

tells us of a box about six inches square, for which he was asked in Japan £100, and he was told that in Tokio fine specimens were bringing their weight in gold. "Old lacquer," he adds, "is rising in price rapidly, and is now almost unknown in Japan—and surely no works are more worthy of admiration than the beautiful works in lacquer which, during the last six hundred years, Japan has produced."

The Japanese possess also in great perfection the art of lacquering on ivory and tortoiseshell minute figures and landscapes, with a mixture of gilding and colouring. In some cases the lacquering is in relief, and in others engraved and sunk. An ivory box, in shape like an orange, in my possession, is very perfect. It represents a group of figures, male and female, following each other *en promenade*, the grass growing under their feet and birds flying over their heads. All these are cut into the ivory, and then coloured with thin layers of lacquer. There are seven figures in all, and nothing can exceed the delicacy of the execution, or the excellence of the design. An ivory cabinet, three inches high by three and a half in width—the same from which the drawers were taken for Fig. 104—is a gem also of artistic execution and design. Back, front, top, and sides are all equally lovingly cared for and finished, while coral, mother-of-pearl, and tortoiseshell have been lavished to increase the beauty of effect. It is not the materials, however, which give the value, but the artistic grace of the design—the grouping of flowers, birds, and trees, the unrivalled delicacy of the workmanship, and, though last,

not least, the conscientiousness with which the whole has been worked out. It has doors, which give access to two recesses and the three drawers of gold lacquer figured with the pattern already given. Small birds, exquisitely wrought in metal, form the handles to the drawers.

Of the Art manufactures and Art Industries of Japan there is much more to be said, and more to be learned perhaps, than is even yet understood, notwithstanding the decided advent of an era of *Japonisme*, as the French term the prevailing admiration for Japanese works. I must not, in any case, omit in this place some notice of the varieties and kinds of paper manufactured in Japan for decorative purposes, and chiefly, but not wholly or exclusively, from the bark of the papyrus.* Rags had not entered at all into the composition of the native paper at the period when I was in

* A tolerably full description of the materials used in their paper manufacture was given in the "Capital of the Tycoon," vol. i. p. 442, derived from personal observation of the processes at Atami, where I resided for a short time, and had ample opportunity of watching the various stages. As to the kind of bark used, Kämpfer described the shrubs botanically, with carefully executed plates. According to this careful writer, the paper in Japan was made of the bark of the *Morus papyrifera sativa*, or true paper-tree (a kind of mulberry), with the addition of a slimy infusion of rice, and also of the *Ozeni* root; and sometimes, as a substitute for the latter, they make use of a "creeping shrub called *Sane Kadsura*, the leaves whereof yield a mucilage in great plenty." Mr. I. Veitch, who spent some time with me in Japan in search of new plants wherewith to enrich our greenhouses and shrubberies, describes the paper-tree of Japan as the *Morus* or *Broussonetia papyrifera*, and also says he found two other plants, grown in the district of Yeddo, for paper-making, namely, a *Buddleia* species and the *Hibiscus*. I sent sixty-seven different varieties of paper, in 1862, to the International Exhibition, besides a large collection of specimens of embossed and imitation leather, made from the same material.

Japan in 1865. But several paper-mills have since been established in the country, with machinery from England and America for the utilisation of rags, chiefly for the manufacture of paper money. As papier mâché, the materials formerly exclusively used supply the foundation for a great deal of their common lacquer ware and toys. But the common paper, made as tough and almost as strong as leather, furnished, when steeped in a drying oil, waterproof rain coats, and coverings for umbrellas. The finer paper did duty for glass in their windows and sliding doors—less transparent, yet more impervious to cold. They succeeded with it in imitating so admirably the stamped and embossed leather in use in Europe some two or three hundred years ago, that when specimens first came under my notice I had difficulty in believing the imitation of the royal arms of Holland, from which country no doubt they received the first idea, was native work. The difficulty of getting rid of the smell of the oil or varnish used in the manufacture is, I believe, the chief obstacle to the substitution of this article in Europe for leather in book-binding, chair-covering, wainscoting, &c. With their inexhaustible ingenuity, they convert their paper into as many uses as the Chinese do their bamboo, and these are almost innumerable. Among others it may surprise some of my readers to learn that the most common, indeed the sole material for handkerchiefs, some ten years ago at least, was an almost diaphanous square of paper about ten inches by fourteen. Its gossamer texture did not prevent a considerable degree

of tenacity, and as the Japanese only require it to perform its office once, after which it is discarded whenever opportunity occurs of throwing it aside, its fineness is perhaps open to less objection than the embroidered cobweb substance of some of the dainty handkerchiefs of cambric to be seen in an English ball-room. The paper rival of the Japanese belle has also its ornamentation from a great variety of delicate patterns stamped upon it in colours, or by a transparency of texture where the design appears. They even weave paper, cut into very narrow coloured strips, and produce pictures by such means, which, if not exactly works of Art, have at least the merit of great ingenuity, and show much delicacy and dexterity of hand.

Their wall-papers deserve an article to themselves from the originality, variety, and the striking effect of the colours and patterns introduced for purposes of decoration. I sent to the Exhibition, in 1862, a collection of several hundred patterns, which I fancied our upholsterers might consult with advantage to themselves and their customers, but I am not aware that they were utilised. The use of powdered mica for the silver effects has the great advantage of never becoming discoloured or tarnishing. And from some of these I should have been glad to select a few patterns to show the novelty and originality of the designs, but their artistic effect would be altogether lost in the absence of colour, and by the necessary reduction to a scale of one-fifth the size of the original.

One of the most original in conception, but also unfortunately the one which most depends for its effect on the colours, represents three discs upon a dark blue ground, the upper and lower light, and the centre one a bright red; while at the angles irregularly are powderings of gold—the whole evidently intended to give the effect of planetary orbs in a night sky, with a sprinkling of stars.

Another represents a pattern composed of sprays of leaves, intermingled with honeysuckle and chrysanthemum flowers, the first in dark lines and the last in silver, with powdering of gold in the intervening spaces, upon a ground of a rich chocolate colour.

A third shows the decorative uses to which the Japanese put the fan. There are three with a gold-powdered surface and a design painted on each—the three being arranged according to Japanese ideas of symmetry, and on a warm stone-coloured ground. Another is a variation of the same subject, but here the ground introduces to our notice a very common arrangement of a hatchment of silver on which the fans are drawn, while the objects upon them are so shaded and painted as to allow the ground pattern to be seen through all the lighter parts. The paper itself is of a delicate French grey.

A paper of the same coloured ground, on which the bamboo is drawn in silver, with the usual grace of the Japanese artist, has an exceedingly good effect.

Another sample of paper, of similar delicate colour as to the ground and silver hatchment, is relieved by

discs irregularly scattered, outlined in purple and gold alternately.

A tangled ivy pattern in dark lines straying irregularly over a neutral or slate tinted ground makes an effective paper.

Of course with these patterns an almost infinite number of different wall-papers are produced, by varying the ground or the colouring of the objects; and there are hundreds of totally different designs and combinations of colour, with which the Japanese gratify their innate love of variety.

Of textile fabrics and embroidery, a species of Art manufacture in which they have also achieved great excellence, I feel hardly competent to speak. Mr. Audsley is mistaken, however, in assuming that the first time Europeans had any opportunity of forming definite ideas about the state of the textile industries of Japan was during the Paris Exhibition of 1867. They were very fairly represented in the Japanese Court of our own International Exhibition of 1862, and some of the specimens are still in my possession. The robes manufactured for the Court in past years were models of beautiful work, both in design, colour, and texture, and many of those from the Tycoon's own looms were there. I agree with him, however, in the opinion that many of the commoner textile fabrics afford the best evidence of the essentially artistic feeling of the people and its universality. In some of the very commonest fabrics—towels and dusters of the least costly material—may be seen choice designs

consisting of the simplest elements. A broken bamboo or two in "counter-changed colours," a flight of birds, or a few creeping plants, suffice in their hands to produce the most pleasing effects, as artistic as they are original. Were I more competent to deal adequately with this part of the subject, space would not allow me to give as detailed and elaborate an account of the textile fabrics of Japan as they merit from their extraordinary beauty and variety. From the thickest of satins, plain or decorated with designs in brocade, to the most gossamer-like gauzes, every combination of silk and gold thread has been carried to perfection by this people.

It was the custom for each Daimio to have his private loom for weaving the brocade with his own crest, which he and his retainers wore on their dress; and these brocades were either of satin, with the design in dull silk, or of combined silk and gold thread; sometimes stiff as cardboard, and quite incapable of making folds.

They weave a thick striped silk, with a cunning arrangement of white strands, which give the effect of a bloom on the surface, like the soft down on plum or peach, through which we see the rich purple or red of the fruit. Thick crapes are made with plain surfaces, and also curiously wrought in the fabrication, with folds or wrinkles in the material, as if in imitation of the skin of some animal.

Sometimes they take a piece of thin white crape and carefully tie up a series of small portions of its surface with fine cord, forming a pattern, and when it is dyed

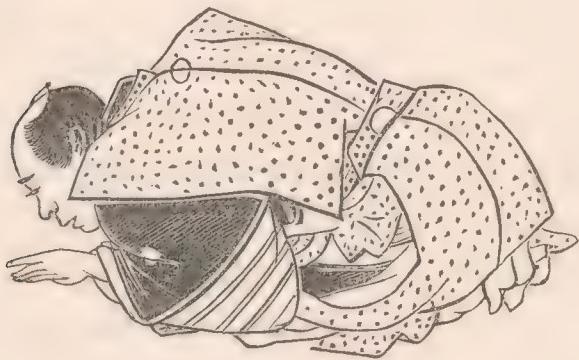
of the desired colour the cords are cut, and the pattern is not only left white, but stands in relief on the crape. The elaborate manipulation by which this effect is secured has been minutely described by Dr. Dresser in his lecture on the Art Industries of Japan already referred to, but I am sorry to say that from the costliness of the hand labour required, the fabric has ceased to be made. Another favourite form of decoration is to print a pattern on crape or soft silk, and afterwards to embroider the prominent objects. Thus we see a stamped design of bamboo, the stems and leaves printed, and the flowers or berries embroidered in silk and gold; or soft evening clouds printed on the silk, and a flight of birds, in imitation of natural colours and forms, worked in delicately tinted silks. The designs for embroidery are endless, and most happy when nearest to Nature, without the conventionality which our schools of Art needlework deem necessary for a striking effect. The dresses worn by the Japanese ladies—now unfortunately, I think, falling into disuse—lent themselves to the form of decoration most in sympathy with the national mind. The wreaths and blossoms could entwine, or be scattered at will over the loose robe and ample sleeves. There was no need for any part of the design to be repeated; a certain harmony was all that was necessary.

We are now endeavouring to copy this emancipation from formality, and the soft crape and silk materials, with patterns in satin, so much introduced in Paris and London, are close imitations of Japanese materials.

They, on the other hand, are learning to make our velvet, which is not a native manufacture. The Japanese possess, in common with, and perhaps in greater degree than, other Oriental nations, the instinct of colour. Not only have they a scale of shades from light to dark like the most delicate notes of music, tones and semitones, but they are perfect masters of the law of contrast, and their textile fabrics reflect these qualities and derive much of their beauty and effect from that cause.

I believe the secret of this power over seemingly discordant colours to be a fearless imitation of Nature, as we see objects with arbitrary surroundings, against the different greens of different foliage, or the endless variety of sky-tints. Pink and scarlet are put together successfully and in direct contrast, with no shading of red to pink, or *vice versa*. Part of this secret is in the arrangement of pattern as well as colour. The strong design will often be broken off with a jagged edge, gently to break, as it were, the moment of change from one colour to the other. The arabesques and diaper patterns are made to change colours on the same object —such as white rings, or squares, or fans, on a blue ground, and the same objects in blue on a white surface. I should imagine the Japanese to possess no code of colouring, every designer putting together the tints that seem happiest to his own mind. This, again, we trace back to their habit of going straight to Nature for inspiration. Every plant, every animal, every change of cloud or wave, is reverently noted and harmoniously

used. They work not after the school of this artist or that, but patiently sit at the feet of the great mother of all beauty, and reap a rich reward. "Real artists," we are told by Ruskin, "are absolutely submissive to law, and absolutely at ease in fancy." No better description could be given of the conditions under which Art is cultivated in Japan, and all the Art Industries perfected. Full of fancy and imaginative power, they are, both by national temperament and training, patient under discipline, rendering a willing obedience to law. Their natural attitude in obeisance to a superior is one of entire submission. Thus prostrate before Nature, as they watch and worship her in all her beauty, they recall the expression and the spirit in which the uncultured African prostrates himself before his chief—"I am your slave, and I love you!"



OBEISANCE.

CHAPTER XIV.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS—GENERAL AND PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS.

IT has been my aim in the preceding chapters, while dwelling on the characteristic features of Japanese Art, to trace through all the Art Industries for which the Japanese are justly celebrated the secret of their success, and to indicate their special claims to admiration. Before leaving the subject, I wish to devote a few pages to the general conclusions to be drawn from a survey of the whole field of Japanese Art, and the industrial uses to which it has been applied.

I have shown, I trust, with sufficient clearness, that all branches of Japanese Art, apart from their popular picture-books, are decorative in their main purpose. But in thus limiting the scope and range of artistic work in Japan, I have been careful to guard against any hasty inference that decorative Art should be regarded as something inferior or ignoble. On the contrary, I hold with the authors of the "Keramic Art in Japan," that it has a noble mission to fulfil; and that no other description of Art can be so widely spread, or can exert so beneficial an effect on all classes of man-

kind; it is the only Art which can be linked with every waking hour of our lives, and which can meet us at every turn. In full confirmation of this view, Ruskin in his last work, "The Laws of Fésole," says that "the only distinction between decorative and other Art is the being fitted for a fixed place; and in this place related, either in subordination or in command, to the effect of other pieces of Art. And all the greatest Art which the world has produced is thus fitted for a place, and subordinated to a purpose. There is no existing highest order Art but is decorative. The best sculpture yet produced has been the decoration of a temple front; the best painting, the decoration of a room; Raphael's best doing is merely the wall-covering of a suite of apartments in the Vatican, and his cartoons were made for tapestries. Correggio's best doing is the decoration of two small church cupolas at Parma; Michael Angelo's of a ceiling in the Pope's private chapel; Tintoret's of a ceiling and side wall belonging to a charitable society at Venice; while Titian and Veronese threw out their noblest thoughts, not even on the inside, but on the outside of the common brick and plaster walls of Venice."* With such high authority for

* This position, I see, would be contested by M. Charles Blanc, de l'Académie Française; for in an article on "Les Fresques de Véronèse au Château de Masère, près Trévise," which appeared in the May number of the *Gazette de Beaux Arts*, he says, "*Décorer* ne signifie pas autre chose qu'embellir les spectacles de la vie et ceux du théâtre, et c'est par un singulier mal-entendu que l'on confond si fréquemment, dans la langage esthétique, l'art décoratif avec le grand Art." He is obliged to admit, however, that "il est bien certain que les maîtres qui ont pratiqué le grand Art l'ont déployé de préférence sur les murailles de Rome, de Florence, de Parme, de Vérone, de Milan et même de Venise, et qu'ainsi les plus fameux génies de la peinture

my estimate of the true value and place of decorative Art, let us turn to the consideration of the comparative and absolute merits of Japanese Art, from which has sprung one of the few original schools still surviving, stamped with the *cachet* it bore from the beginning, and distinguished by it from every other. In its somewhat limited range I have contended that it possesses a degree and a kind of excellence which seem to be unattainable under existing conditions of Art work in Europe. I believe it has been well and truly said that no other race "understands better the vital exigencies of ornamentation, or is more skilful in manual practice." And further, that "within their confined scope, they were in advance of all others when the country was first opened to foreign intercourse." I think it may be no less truly said that as a race, the Japanese still continue in advance in many branches of Art Industry. No European workman could at this day match the beauty and excellence of their finest pieces of lacquer and enamel ware.

II.

Art, however, has many forms of development, and passes through many stages of progress and phases of existence. Oriental Art-thought seems in some respects

ayant inventé leur chefs-d'œuvre pour les écrire sur la surface des édifices, ont élevé par cela même ce qui n'était qu'un ornement de l'architecture à la hauteur des plus nobles et des plus belles conceptions de l'Art. Mais il n'en reste pas moins vrai que l'art décoratif est un art inférieur en tant qu'il est un pur spectacle, un amusement de nature à effleurer l'imagination en égayant le regard."

to have always differed essentially from that of Aryan or Indo-European descent. This is equally true of graphic delineation and Art motives. Albert Dürer and Holbein do not differ so essentially from Titian or Raphael, as do the Japanese from all these collectively. This does not preclude a fundamental and true affinity in certain directions. If we go back to the earlier periods of Art, and of Gothic architecture in Europe, we find in many cases a very striking parity of conception and artistic treatment, reminding us of the most characteristic Japanese works. The Gargoyles with their wild contortions and Rabelaic coarseness of expression, mingled with a grotesque and fantastic treatment, closely correspond to that of the dragon and other mythic animals and creatures, on which the Eastern races still lavish no small amount of artistic feeling and treatment. And they show, what is now but rarely seen in Europe, that loving, patient elaboration, which spares neither time nor labour to give the best that they can, and all that they know. There is a great deal of conventionality in most of their artistic work, and this, sometimes applied to the human figure, is allied with distortion and bad drawing; but they are simply where our own mediæval artists *were*, as may be seen in all our cathedrals and ancient monuments, as well as in the missals and other Art representations of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. There was in the Exhibition of Old Masters at the Royal Academy last year a picture of the "Adoration of the Infant Saviour," by Fra Filippo Lippi, in

which some of the figures and the cattle are drawn very much as a Japanese artist of the present day would represent them.

It has been said, erroneously I think, that there is "no record of the Japanese ever having essayed to portray landscapes after the methods accepted by us as actually correct." In the preceding chapters* many specimens of successful efforts in this direction have been given. But they can make no pretension to compete with the Art of Europe, in what constitutes a picture, whether of landscape or figures. The pictorial side of Art is in a comparatively undeveloped state among the Japanese, though power of expression, combined with simplicity of treatment, is a characteristic of Japanese Art. It is indeed the expressiveness of their Art and its suggestiveness which impart to it much of its distinctive excellence.

Yet each time that I find myself giving expression to this denial of their pictorial power, I have a misgiving that it is only the enunciation of an imperfect truth, and without much qualification I may be doing the Japanese a great wrong. I have just returned from a visit to the studio of a Royal Academician to view a picture which I doubt not will be among the most admired of the works at the exhibition of this year. The subject is taken from Oriental life, replete with human interest, and with all the accessories of an Eastern interior. The subtle harmonies of mingled colour and tone, which seem almost inseparable from the work of Eastern

* See Chapters V. and VII., pp. 82 and 124.

hands, are all carefully reproduced and contrasted in effect by the bright colours of the flowing robes and silk brocades of a group of figures. Careful drawing, artistic composition, and all the technical excellence of a perfect mastery of material, and the knowledge of every principle of Art practised from the days of Cimabue and Giotto were there, to enhance the interest and impress the imagination. While yet under the spell of a masterpiece of modern painting, a casual reference to the Japanese brought forth from a recess of the studio a long roll, which the artist attached to his easel for view, covering his own picture in the act, to show a recent purchase of a Japanese drawing picked up at one of the Art sales in London, where week by week some of the treasures of the world, both old and new, are redistributed among the fortunate few who have the taste to appreciate, and the wealth to purchase, the creations of genius and artistic power. The design when unrolled presented as striking a picture as can well be imagined. It was a great flight and descent of storks. From above, coming from afar, was seen in graduated perspective a cloud of birds, as if there had been a call from the uttermost ends of the earth for all the species to appear; while below as vast an assemblage had already reached the ground, in every possible variety of form and attitude. Those in the foreground were of considerable size, and dashed in with the hand of a master. There was no colour to aid, it was all in black and white, but the effect of the whole was marvellous. It seized upon the imagination, recalling the

vision of the Apostle in the Revelation, where "all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven" are summoned to the supper at the opening of the seals—or the Day of Judgment, as Michael Angelo has painted it! So well had the artist with his simple materials given the effect of multitudinous flight and assemblage, the one in the air and the other on earth, each answering to the other, that the mind was filled with a sense of something supernatural and weird. And yet every part was so true to Nature that each bird of the flight seemed instinct with life. By a few masterly touches and sweeps of the pencil the rush of the descending flock was vividly presented, and the "sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle." As the roll disappeared and the picture beneath was again brought in view, the contrast was great, but I felt the Japanese artist, had he been there to look upon and admire it as I did, might, like Correggio when he first stood before a masterpiece of Raphael, have exclaimed with perfect truth, "*Anch' Io son pittore!*"

It is this intense sympathy with Nature which gives the Japanese artist his graphic power, and the hold he establishes on the imagination, by a suggestiveness which rarely defines, but leaves to the spectator the business of interpretation by a kindred poetic feeling and imaginative faculty.

III.

Of the Japanese, Mr. Jarves justly observes in regard to one of the many characteristic excellences of their work, "The mechanical perfection of their work, carpentry, metal-work, papers, leather,—in short, whatever they manufacture, from a mammoth bell down to a box hinge or hair-pin, is quite as conspicuous to the eye of a mechanic as are the æsthetic features of the objects of Art to an artist." And again, "The Japanese workman is a thorough worker and master of his particular art, content with nothing short of absolute technical perfection, æsthetic and material, in every object he undertakes, whether it be cheap or valuable, usually labouring by himself, in his own cottage, or else with sympathetic associates, on such branches of Art as had been slowly perfected by many generations of his ancestors, under the fostering care of their feudal lords. Thus he was born both to pride and skill in his work." I cannot so entirely agree with Mr. Jarves when he goes on to indicate, in the life and surroundings of the artisan class in Japan, what he considers "a fathomless gulf between him and the average European artisan doomed to monotonous uninspiring toil, herded with his fellows in unwholesome factories, or the filthy purlieus of crowded cities." There is something fanciful, I think, and unreal in this contrast. I do not see what there is in the nature of a Japanese artisan's work, in all the different branches of industrial occupation, which should be

any more "akin to his tastes, and a source of happiness to all concerned," than in the case of the English mechanic. Mr. Jarves says it was so (for he speaks in the past tense), because, "besides the domestic satisfaction of being always at home, in a congenial circle of qualified critics and co-labourers, his own spirit unconsciously imbibed in more or less degree some of the purity, poetry, and refinements of the motives which actuated his Art—derived in general from the ever-bountiful landscape which was always an unfailing source of pleasure to his easily contented household, or from the pictorial literature which embodied the myths, romances, traditions, and history of his native land, whose 'great peace' in this manner interpenetrated his inmost being. It is no matter of surprise that he left his work with reluctance, returned to it with zest to perfect it, and was always diligent without thinking of how much he was to gain by it—the pay was at best a mere pittance. The same system and lowness of wages once obtained in Mediæval Europe,* producing the best work, even when artists were put on the same social footing as common mechanics and day labourers. The *working* architects especially, master masons we term them now, built up the best architecture of the time, step by step, as they went on with their work, qualifying themselves in every point, and thus making an æsthetic unity of the structure and its uses, as original as it was appropriate

* As it does still in Switzerland and some other countries where work is carried on in cottages, and by one or more of a family.

—economically done also.” “But,” he concludes, “we have changed all this, as we are fast obliterating the ancient Japanese artisan and turning him into a machine labourer, prompt to begin and end on the minute, to run on time, caring only for his pay, careless of what he does, as well he may be, for there is no soul in what is required of him.”

There is a great deal of this which is true and unanswerable, yet such comparisons and contrasts are liable to be carried too far. No doubt simplicity of living, the absence of expensive habits and of a desire for luxuries or intoxicating drinks, must always tend to liberate the workman from anxieties and harassing cares, injurious to his working powers. In that respect our mediæval workmen had the advantage over their descendants living in the midst of a higher civilisation and in a more artificial state, with innumerable wants and cares, from which his more easily contented ancestor was free. Multiplied wants, and a higher style of living, are sources of expense, and make the pay of an artisan for the work of his hands a main consideration. But it may fairly be doubted whether in other respects the life and surroundings of the Moyen-Age artisan in Europe, say in the fifteenth century, were much different in essentials from those of his successors in the present day. Judging by the mediæval remains of narrow streets and crowded alleys in the older parts of towns still existing in Europe, the master masons and other workmen were probably not much more luxuriously lodged than the better class of artisans

are now. I doubt if they were under any better sanitary conditions. Every cottage was not probably the paradise conjured up by the imaginative writer. There may have been scolding wives and squalling children in times past as now. Artists may even have been like Albert Dürer, who, says tradition, was subjected to sore disturbance from the trap-door over his painting-room, made by his wife, that she might rail at him without the trouble of going down-stairs. Workmen, too, had not always sympathetic critics or harmonious co-labourers to work with, but were exposed to bitter trade disputes and trade-union tyranny under the guilds. In fine, the world, as it advances in age, changes less in essentials than in outward forms; and although the love of Art, and working power, may be better promoted by a kind of pastoral or idyllic life among artisans, than in our crowded factories and towns, yet a nation with artistic tendencies like the Japanese, and the Art faculty under high culture for centuries, will not suddenly cease to produce artistic work, even under such deteriorating influences as an alien civilisation, or an undiscriminating demand for inferior and cheap articles. How far such a deterioration may extend, aided by the failure of that refined love for the best work irrespectively of cost, which the Daimios did so much to foster, is no doubt a grave question—one, moreover, which all true lovers of Art and perfect work must view with anxiety. For among the untoward effects of progress in many directions, by which Japan as well as England may fall under Mr. Ruskin's ban at no distant day as a "machine-and-

devil-driven land where no Art can prosper," these must be taken into account. Let us hasten, before this fate overtakes the Japanese, and their Art in all its pristine qualities is lost, to study what it can teach us.

IV.

This late utterance of the great Art critic, in some despairing mood, suggests another of the leading and most characteristic merits of Japanese Art — the impress of individuality, to which I have referred at length in the chapter on Originality,* giving to every article which leaves the artistic workman's hands a separate identity, thus transferring his own individuality to his work. Mr. Jarves gives expression to his feelings on this subject so eloquently that I am tempted to quote the following passages entire in his own words. When speaking of Japanese of a past generation, and a state of things passing away, he observes:—

"But our workman was free to work when he felt in the mood to do justice to his object, and equally free to seek repose the instant fatigue notified him of failing powers. By no other system could he have attained to such uniform perfection, and infinite variety in his work, as he shows in everything which can be classed under the head of a Fine Art. The absolute excellence, rare invention and pure taste, accurate finish, and entire adaptability of each article to its destined use, besides

* Chapter IV. p. 65.

its superimposed harmonious and æsthetic *cachet*, beauty combined with the cleanliness and neatness that is next to godliness, infiltrating every fibre of an object—all this make up a veritable music for the eye, even in those cheap articles which are destined for the multitude. Each is perfect, novel, and idiosyncratic; no more like its neighbours than one man of spirit is the tame reflection of another man."

There is one other and very distinctive character in Japanese Art viewed as a whole, to which I have only alluded, but it is well deserving more careful consideration, because it extends its influence over the whole range of his artistic work. I refer to the Japanese workman's point of departure. It has been truly remarked that the Greeks took the human figure as the point of departure of their varied conceptions; and Mr. Sidney Colvin equally justly observes, in a lecture lately delivered,* that "the one sovereign characteristic of the Greek genius was its anthropomorphism—that tendency of the Greek imagination to conceive of all the forces, both of Nature and the human spirit, all powers, both of the physical and mental world, as incarnated in divinities possessing the attributes and lineaments of men and women, only stronger and more perfect than the men and women of the real world. This was the source of all the religion and all the Art of that great people. Not only were they endowed with great physical beauty and perfection in their persons,

* Cantor Lectures on Connection of Greek and Roman Art. See *Journal of the Society of Arts*, September and October, 1877.

but they lived under extraordinarily favourable conditions of climate; and the outcome of these conditions was that when they began to put their hands to tools, and to paint and carve the creations of their minds, in the course of a few generations they filled all the temples and towns with images the most beautiful the world had ever seen."

The Japanese, on the contrary, like the Hindoos, have never sought for excellence in this direction. Taking their principal Art motives from the works of Nature in the lower fields of creation, they seem to have missed the highest type of beauty. Nor is it without interest, from an æsthetic point of view, to mark all that they seem to have lost by failing to take the human figure, with its marvellous grace of outline, perfection of curves, and beauty of proportions, as a true point of departure. Even their passion for variety, and aversion to sameness, might have found its highest satisfaction in this direction.

It is true, that with a climate in some degree similar, and not inferior to that of Greece, the Japanese have not had the incentive supplied to the Greeks in the great physical beauty of their own race. Neither men nor women in Japan have any pretensions to beauty. They have many other qualities, both physical and mental, more to be prized than mere beauty of form, tried by any but an æsthetic standard. Their love of Nature is very genuine, and the love of their own country is so strong that they are ever ready to sacrifice life and fortune for its honour and independence. They have other heroic

virtues also, which add worth to the national character. The *Harakiri* of which we have heard so much—the act by which they deliberately lay down their lives and die by their own hand, rather than survive dishonour, or bring disgrace on their families, is chivalrous in its origin. They have early felt that physical pain is not the worst of evils, and that life itself is not the most precious of objects, but freely to be risked or given, when the ends for which they live are at stake. With them a “peace-at-any-price” policy would find no tolerance or favour. In view of these national characteristics, the want of physical beauty is a small drawback.

But it is for this reason, perhaps, natural that they should be wanting in admiration for the type that is alone familiar to them. The Apollo Belvedere, or the Venus de' Medici, would, I believe, have no attractions for a Japanese eye. They may have an ideal of female beauty and of manly vigour; but, if so, it is something different from ours, for nothing could be less attractive to European eyes, or more remote from the taste and standard of Grecian Art than the Japanese type. The elongated features, slanting eyes, and other characteristics of the representations they make in their drawings of men and women of rank, with all their cumbersome superfluity of costume, are utterly repugnant to any cultured European's taste, or artistic types. They have certainly never given themselves up to the study of the human figure for forms of beauty. As an Art motive, this does not exist anywhere, I believe, in the East; and it forms a fundamental ground of difference and

inferiority. "The Fine Arts," "with the human soul and form as their motives, and human excellence or spiritual loveliness as their aims in expression, have no part in the æsthetic constitution of the Japanese." When they make an objective use of man, it is with a different feeling and aim. Having no love for plastic beauty, in this its highest form, they cannot be compared with the Greeks. Yet it is true that within narrower limits, on a lower plane, they display the highest power of Art expression, and a keen sense of all that is most beautiful in flower and tree—in birds, with their glory of plumage and grace of motion—in fishes, as they gleam with the colours of the rainbow in their native element, or shells and seaweed strewing the shore with inimitable perfection of tint and texture. Their love for Nature's works in all these directions is the result of a deep sympathy with natural beauty, which strangely stops short of the point when man himself, the crowning act of creative power, occupies the ground. With them it would almost seem as if "all, save the spirit of man, is divine." And yet, as Mr. Jarves observes, "narrower in range, but less spiritual in motive, and less ambitious in its aims, the Art of Japan is less fettered by technical rule, and is more subtle, varied, free, and truthfully artistic in decorative expression. It abounds in unaffected effects and delicious surprises, with other coquettices and charms of æsthetic speech. Its good things never grow stale or din by monotony."

No one could better, or more adequately, express the feeling which Japanese artistic work inspires, nor

is this enumeration of its chief characteristics in the least degree overcharged, in my opinion.

V.

But having rendered this ample tribute to Japanese Art, we may still understand how “painting, sculpture, and architecture in their supreme significance, with human soul and form as their fundamental motives,” are closed books to the Japanese artist, or only come within the scope of his work in so far as they subserve objects of utility, or are otherwise necessary as secondary motives and adjuncts. We see the result, and are continually reminded of their shortcomings and imperfection whenever they attempt to draw the human figure undraped, or four-footed animals. They fail in drawing, and seem never to have any perception of the harmony and refined beauty of line and æsthetic proportion displayed in the human figure. They cannot, to this day, draw a hand or a foot. How much the Japanese have lost, and how immeasurably in this aspect of Art they remain behind the Greeks, may best be seen by comparing the frieze and the architecture of the Parthenon with the richest of the Japanese temples—their ornate roofs and carved façades ; or the Apollo and other great deities of the Greek mythology, as these were rendered by the chisel of Phidias and his school, with the Kami and idols of Japan. No delicacy of execution and perception of the beauties of Nature, in flowers and plants, could supply the place of this higher knowledge

and perceptive power, which made the special glory of the Greek race. Mr. Jarves may be right in observing that "it is one thing to produce a Michael Angelo, whose works isolated by a transcendent genius above the comprehension of the multitude, and quite another to invent innumerable lovely objects which all can appreciate and enjoy, but which could not have existed, unless there were numberless artists and a natural capacity of evolving their happiest efforts." But, however true this may be, we must take note of the fact as a subject of regret, that a correct and appreciative idea of the beautiful in our species as an Art motive does not exist in the Orient, and nowhere less than in Japan. We need not on that account neglect or despise what the Japanese have accomplished in the decorative arts without such aid. It is the more material, indeed, to distinguish what are the essential constituents of their Art, and discriminate between what is merely due to skilful execution, and what to the higher gifts of mental power and imagination or fancy, from whence spring invention and all that is original. As the mind that conceives, and the hand that executes, are most frequently united in the same person in Japan, it is not perhaps so easy as may be supposed to assign to each its proper share in the perfect work that is the joint result. To do this the characteristic excellences of any one product must be critically analyzed. Mr. Jarves has gone into this critical study with great earnestness, and observes, among other things, that "it is in rendering the charac-

teristic meaning and technical force, the gradations, purity, and limpidity of tones, the subtle whole of Japanese Art, that the European copyist always fails. His tints are certain to be crude, aggravated by his ignorance of these multifarious, versatile, and mobile models drawn from the minor forms of Nature, so profoundly but delicately comprehended by the Japanese artist and workman, who are in general identical." Nothing can be truer than this comparative estimate, and the following remark is no less so :—" Every effort I have yet seen on the part of their European rivals to produce Japanese decorative Art in the style and spirit of the original, only serves to show there is still an impassable gulf between the technical elements as well as ideas of the Asiatic and European Art works."

In the *Monthly Review of Technical and Scientific Education at Home and Abroad*, a number of which has just come under my notice, I also find the following pertinent remarks :—

"It is a pleasure to see the growing tendency of writers on Art Industries advocating the propriety of copying Japanese Art in embroidery; the skill of the Japanese is everywhere admitted, but the Art by which a large surface is made to appear quite full of a design, when even only a very few touches are expended upon the work, is the very essence of the Art in which our amateurs fail lamentably. This was seen in many poor imitations of Japanese and other Oriental work at the Needlework Exhibition in the spring of this year. Great sprawling lines meaning nothing, but evidently

intended to represent quaint stems of reeds, only succeeded in simulating the appearance of badly repaired, irregular rents in the woven material they were intended to decorate. The elegant proportions of the several parts of a Japanese design cannot be understood without study, although the effect produced by the accomplished artists themselves is readily accepted as most agreeable to the eyes of even the most inexperienced on-looker. It is, therefore, absolutely incumbent on every worker in crewel or any of the other forms of embroidery to go through a patient course of geometry, and the rudiments of the art of drawing simple forms of natural objects correctly. As we have no school in England where the principles of design based upon the more correct teaching of the Japanese may be acquired, it might be well for our amateurs to practise continually drawing from small sprays of elegant foliage, with a brush filled with colour, until they acquire that freedom of hand which is the basis of all progress in this form of design."

This freedom of hand, which is so remarkable in the Japanese, it has been suggested, may be greatly due to the practice necessary to gain facility in writing both the cursive and the official characters. But I quote these remarks, not as indorsing the criticism of the particular exhibition of needlework referred to—which I have not myself examined—but because it well expresses what I have so often noticed in the imperfect attempts to imitate the characteristic features of Japanese embroidery and patterns generally. More especially I was

struck with the justness of the critical taste which discerned the art acquired by Japanese workmen, of making a large surface appear full of a design by a few touches so artistically placed, that the absence of labour is not noticed.

There is another cause for the insuperable difficulty experienced in attempts to copy Japanese works. The informing spirit of the artist is wanting with us. Among other characteristics of Japanese workmanship one always escapes the copyist, namely, the skilful manner, hiding, if it may be so termed, the manual means by which their artists "bring vividly in view the animating idea of their work." It is wonderful indeed how they effect this "by a few lines, dots, blotches of light, shade or colours; always simply and sparsely, with no unnecessary labour, and certain to stop at the precise point the idea is reached, without elaborating any detail not absolutely required to complete the unity and emphasize the meaning of the composition, doing too little rather than too much technically; concentrating the attention in the artistic aim, and with slight perceptible effort printing a whole biography of an individual, or the complete habits and existence of an animal, the nature of a plant, the state of the atmosphere, and the sentiment of a season, explicit form of design for the eye, and unlimited suggestion for the mind."*

These are the outcome of conditions of mind and spiritual insight, superadded to great technical mastery

* Jarves, "A Glimpse at the Art of Japan."

of materials and skilful hands, which lie beyond the reach of all mere imitators. But, indeed, it has been truly said that "every art which is thoroughly genuine, every art which is the spontaneous expression of a people's taste and feeling, has in it some precious and incommunicable quality, which is a part of the great mind of humanity, and setting itself forth in the most perfect shape."*

VI.

In judging of any school or of any phase of Art, it is very essential that we should distinguish the aim or object of the Artist. Modern painters seek as their object to produce a picture that shall win admiration, whether the subject be one of animal life, a landscape, or a scene of historical interest.

Several of the old masters devoted no small portion of their time to the decoration of palaces, cabinets, vases, and a variety of other objects, the aim being essentially decorative. Many of these no doubt combined the two objects; as, for example, Raphael in the Vatican, Michael Angelo in the Sistine Chapel, Giotto in the frescoes of Assisi, Leonardo da Vinci in his celebrated Lord's Supper in the refectory of the monastery at Milan. These all left works of such pictorial power and elevation of thought, as to command the admiration of succeeding generations and entitle them to take

* "Thoughts about Art," by Philip Gilbert Hamerton. Macmillan & Co.
1875.

rank among the best pictures of high Art. Such artists as these held, evidently, what we seem to have questioned in later times, that no art is too good for decoration, and accordingly gave their best to the decorative work they undertook. The Japanese with no pretensions to high Art, and who have never painted a picture to hang in a gallery, yet working on the same principle as the great painters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe, have, nevertheless, attained rare excellence in their decorative and industrial Art. All their models, as I have shown, have been derived from Nature. Its flowers and fruit, its trees and birds, have been their chief study, and although treated frequently in a conventional way, yet, when represented on their best porcelain and lacquer ware, these objects are often more true to Nature than they are in many of the pictures of our own artists, where fidelity and realism are most essential. There is thus, as all good artists know, a high Art in decoration, as well as a high Art in pictures such as Velasquez and Rembrandt and Titian have given to the world. And it would be a mistake to assume that these two kinds of Art did not exist contemporaneously in their day, and both in great perfection.* Then as now, and as the Japanese have shown for many centuries, excellence in decorative Art must spring from true artistic feeling and an æsthetic perception of the beautiful. A perfect knowledge of the forms in Nature is no

* See *Spectator* for some suggestive articles on Popular Art, 10th, 17th, and 21st March, 1878.

less essential as a first groundwork. But this artistic feeling and æsthetic perception vary considerably in races no less than in individuals, and they vary both in kind and degree. In some, as in the Greeks, their architecture and plastic art alike seemed to breathe a fine instinct of immortality, seeking to spiritualise the grosser matter by which they sought to attain the ideal. We see a similar instinctive effort and intuition in the grand religious edifices of the Middle Ages, speaking both to the heart and the soul, of aspirations towards the Divine and the Infinite. In the temples of Ancient Greece, as in the cathedrals and abbeys of Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, although religious sentiment found expression in both, the æsthetic and intellectual predominated in the Greek; while in the Latin and Teutonic races at a later period it was the religious element, and Religion of a more absorbing character, which sought to symbolize in material forms the spiritual and the divine. It is easy to trace the determining influence of these different sources of inspiration in the most celebrated and beautiful of their architectural creations. Other races have had their temples or shrines—Egyptians and Hindoos, as well as the nations who have left such stupendous monuments in the ruins now half buried in the tropic forests of Burmah and Yucatan. But for our present purpose the Greeks and the Europeans, or those who inhabited Europe from the Rhine to the Guadalquivir and the Danube, not excluding therefore the Saracen and Arab races, who have left in Spain the impress of their

genius and religion in architectural monuments of surpassing grace and beauty, may suffice to illustrate the variety of æsthetic development at different epochs, and in nations of different origin. Among these, as architects neither the Japanese nor the Chinese have any place; for the pagoda of the former, if neither deficient in grace nor originality, has a touch of the bizarre in its design, and nothing sublime or spiritual.

The religious element in the constitution of both races was, and is, indeed, so singularly mixed up with the worship of their respective sovereigns, as of Divine descent, and impersonations of the Deity, that it could not possibly have given rise to any high aspirations or feeling of the sublime and the spiritual. Their gods and heroes are all grotesque, even when intended to be terrible, and extravagant when not hideous,—in posture, feature, and costume. Of grandeur and sublimity the Japanese especially seem to have no idea, and they mingle with the most serious or tragic subjects a sort of grim humour and levity difficult to understand. Here it is the character of the people that gives form and expression to their Art. They depict what they feel in relation to objects of admiration or reverence, which are outside of and above them, and the result is so little in harmony with our conceptions, that they appear grotesque and unnatural.

VII.

The influence which Art and Art culture have exercised in developing national character and civilisation in all ages of the world, together with the converse action of character in the development of Art, is a subject of great interest. With the Japanese, dead to any sense of beauty in the human figure, this one fact seems to me to have determined the direction of their Art culture, and its degeneration into grotesque, and often gross and distorted, conceptions of humanity. All their types are burlesqued and exaggerated. They idealize nothing human, and depict all life in its grotesque, humorous, or deformed aspects—a kind of ideal ugliness and distortion. Their human figures, and Kami or Gods, are alike remarkable for the extravagance of their postures and costumes, the violence of their action, and an odd mingling of the ludicrous with the hideous or terrible, not devoid of a grim sense of humour, but Rabelaic in its grossness and total want of subtlety or refinement.

It has been said that architecture with its every accessory, and statuary, are the two great expressions of ancient and early Art—with the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman it certainly was so. But a fine sense of æsthetic proportion and harmony of outline were the essential conditions of excellence in either, and it is precisely in these qualities that the Japanese are most deficient. This, added to other conditions of existence, such as their volcanic soil, may have materially influenced their

Art development not only in architecture, but in other directions. The finest combination of elliptic curves, the most harmonious lines expressive of strength and beauty, and the most perfect and æsthetic development of the law of proportions are to be found in the human form, and in no other work of Nature in equal perfection. A nation or race, therefore, that failed to recognise this fundamental truth, and went to other and inferior sources of inspiration and Art culture, necessarily shut themselves out from the highest reach of Art, and accepted a lower place in the scale of artistic development. Their passion for variety and fine sense of the harmonies and beauty of colour seem to have led them into the fields and woods, where both could be enjoyed in their greatest beauty and perfection.

VIII.

They found in Nature constant repetition of the same forms and colours in a regulated order of succession, but with a constant variant of difference and alternation, and occasionally sudden contrasts, both of colour and form, to break a too continuous and apparent regularity, the whole being not the less subject to a geometrical plan, from which no departure was allowed. In the adoption of these conditions of creative power, they laid the foundation of all Japanese Art. "Just as the entire system of possible Christian Art is founded on the principles established by Giotto in Florence, he receiving

them from Cimabue, the last of their disciples," according to Ruskin; so the Japanese, taking Nature for their guide and master, realised to a great degree the truth of the same author's conclusion that "drawing may be taught by tutors, but design only by Heaven."* In like manner, if under the "Laws of Fésole" may be most strictly and accurately arranged every principle of Art practised at its purest source from the twelfth to the fifteenth century inclusive; so under the laws of development and conditions of life manifested in the vegetable and floral kingdoms, every principle of Art in Japan has been arranged; all derived from this pure source, and inflexibly adhered to with the absolute submission to authority and law, which is a characteristic of the nation. These conditions, however, more especially the fixed uniformity of plan with a geometrical basis, in less artistic and able hands would have proved fatal to any pursuit of novelty and variety. The Egyptians and the Greeks accepted readily enough the regularity and rigid uniformity of plan in geometric lines, both in their buildings and decorative Art, and rested content in the harmony of proportions and outline with equal divided spaces, finding in this direction full satisfaction for their æsthetic faculties. But this could never have satisfied the prevailing want of the Japanese mind. There must indeed be some instinct or intuition which leads mankind in all stages of development to adopt a geometrical pattern. In the most recent excavations of some Breton and Celtic mounds at Carnac

* See "The Laws of Fésole." Preface by John Ruskin, LL.D.

at the Bossens,* the real makers being probably the Normans of Aurelian's time, and their half-civilised Gallic subjects, were found Celtic remains of pottery scratched with geometrical patterns. The decorations of the oldest Athenian vases began in the same way ; and their artists very slowly learned to design flowers, birds, beasts, and men. But to discover as a fact that these are all controlled in their forms and development by geometric laws, and built up on formal plans and designs of a similar nature, was a great advance ; and this I am led to believe was a step actually taken at a very early period in the history of Japanese Art. Workmen and artists alike, so imbued with a love of Nature in all her moods and changes, that it became an endless source of pleasure to watch the processes of evolution, and more especially delighting in the variety which they found in this inexhaustible field, may well have contracted an instinctive aversion to anything approaching monotonous regularity, or a dull uniformity of effect. And in this *liber studiorum* they must have sought, as they certainly found, the means by which all appearance of either might best be avoided. As I have already pointed out, they have unquestionably been at as much pains to avoid that kind of symmetry which most conforms to European canons, and which consists in an exact balance of equal parts—lines and divisions of spaces—as we have ever taken to secure it. If they learned, as I have assumed, the necessity of adhering to ground-plans of geometrical rigidity and regularity, from

* See "Archæological Researches at Carnac in Brittany," by James Miln.

the same source they were taught how Nature, working under these conditions, concealed the fact, and by many subtle combinations and devices produced unfailing variety of effect, combined with symmetry and harmony, without which mere variety fails to charm. In the natural world these fundamental conditions of variety, symmetry and harmony, both in form and colour, never fail to gratify the sense of beauty and fitness, and the craving for its satisfaction. They must have learned very early, from actual observation, the latest lesson Ruskin is inculcating, that "every beautiful form in this world is varied in the minutiae of the balanced sides;" and that no law of beauty can be nobly observed "without occasional wilfulness of violation."

IX.

To attain the same end in their decorative Art was the task which would seem to have absorbed the Japanese, and with the whole force of their genius to have determined the form of development the Art faculty with which they were so largely gifted should take. That they should have evolved a different principle of symmetry from that which has prevailed in the Western world, and made it consist of a balance of corresponding, *but unequal and partially dissimilar parts*, is one of the most instructive facts furnished by their Arts. A similar evolution of a principle of symmetry is not, however, unknown in Europe. In the best Art and in

decorative compositions of all ages, consciously or otherwise, this kind of compensative balance has been sought, without correspondence of equal or like parts, by emphasizing certain features on which attractiveness is lavished, giving to these parts determinate positions, while the other parts are more or less confused in arrangement. So with colour, and effects of light and shade, whether in historical or landscape painting, all the great masters have sought a certain balance of corresponding but dissimilar parts, without too much regard often to what would be possible in Nature.

Hogarth says, “It is a constant rule in composition in painting to avoid regularity.” And he adds, “In my mind odd numbers have the advantage over the even ones. Nature in all her works of fancy, where it seems immaterial whether even or odd numbers of division were preferred, most frequently employs the odd, as, for example, in the indenting of leaves, flowers, blossoms, &c.” He devotes chapters to the waving line and the serpentine line, and concludes that “the art of composing well is the art of varying well.”

The same balancing of different parts, both as regards the disposition of outline and masses of light and shade, at one time entered largely into the plans of the architect. More especially may this be observed in the Gothic style, which flourished on this side of Europe from the latter part of the twelfth until the revival of the classic order in the sixteenth century—characterized by pointed arch and pillars, which are extended so as

to lose all trace of classical proportions, by shafts placed side by side, often of different thicknesses, and as variously clustered and combined.

In the decorative style of Gothic—the most complete and perfect development of which was not fully matured in the early English style—arches of different proportions are used, and the forms and proportions of the windows also differed very considerably.

The decorated style, which prevailed throughout the greater part of the fourteenth century, was first introduced in the reign of Edward I., but it was in the reigns of Edward II. and III. that this style was in general use; and early English seems to have been the first of the pointed or Gothic styles adopted in this country. Succeeding the Norman towards the end of the twelfth century, it gradually merged into the decorated at the end of the thirteenth.

Dating so far back, we cannot expect to find many perfect specimens of any of the styles with their most characteristic features,—to which they owe, I venture to think, much of their picturesqueness and charm. It may be association or mere fancy on my part, but there is a relief to the eye, and a glad sense of escape from a wearying monotony of level lines and equal measurements, when it meets with these creations of the artistic mind of bygone generations in Gothic edifices, with all their irregularities, whether in castle, monastery, or cathedral.

Many examples are still existing, however—in the baronial halls and in the cathedrals of England—of the

grouping of dissimilar parts in the same building, dating wholly or in part from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; such, for instance, as Horeham Hall, Essex, erected in the reign of Elizabeth, and Hinchinbrook House, Huntingdonshire, built by Sir Henry Cromwell.

Horeham Hall is an excellent example,* where all the chief features are dissimilar: erected by a Sir John Cutt, or Cutts, a man of great wealth, immediately preceding the reign of Elizabeth, and where, when princess in the reign of Mary, she retired as a place of refuge.

Hinchinbrook House, the residence of Earl Sandwich, has also many historical associations connected with it. Sir Henry Cromwell, called the Golden Knight, from the liberality of his largesses, we are told, built it partly out of the materials of an adjacent monastery about the year 1546, in Henry VIII.'s time, which may in part account for its picturesque irregularities of construction. Here Oliver Cromwell, his nephew, passed much of his boyhood.

Arabian, Saracen, and Moorish architecture has been described as a fanciful and interesting style, combining Egyptian, Grecian, and Roman details, with the light fantastic lattice-work of the Persians, all blended with taste and skill, so that the borrowed forms are adapted and made to harmonize. The horseshoe, the semi-circular, and the pointed arch give great variety; although the Arabian architects, if they did not invent

* See "The Baronial Halls and Picturesque Edifices of England." Text by S. C. Hall, F.S.A., and the illustrations by several artists. Chapman and Hall.

the pointed arch—a disputed question—certainly made use of it from a very early period, without approaching the pointed or Gothic style, into which it freely enters also. They are indeed distinguished by the avoidance of the vertical principle, the true characteristic of Gothic architecture, while the Arabian and Saracenic architects preserved the horizontal line, down even to the latest period, as a general rule—although the vertical principle is exemplified in the outline of the minaret.

Thus much may be cited from the best authorities to show that the law of symmetry has had various interpretations in different ages and nations, ranging from the Greek to the Japanese, and admits of such diversified rendering—the authority for which may be found in Nature, where analogous principles of composition are constantly in operation, and where, in fact, the Japanese obtained all their Art notions.

X.

There, too, they gained without doubt another characteristic of Japanese Art, namely, the perfect adaptation of all their decorative designs to the material and the object, whatever the nature of the one, or the destined use of the other. They seem instinctively to have avoided a common error in Western countries of adopting the same models for different materials. The forms and the treatment best suited to a plastic material, such as the potter's clay, they know cannot be equally fitting for iron or bronze. The workman, whatever his material,

adapts his thought and artistic conception to its capabilities, and projects himself into it as a fitting mould for the reception of the ideal in his mind.

This, also, he gained from his sympathy with Nature, and constant study of the invariable adaptation of form and colour to the material employed, and the end to be served. How infinite in number, and admirable in their perfect adaptation, are the various modes in which plants and flowers, birds and insects, are created, so that the well-being and perfection of each individual, and the general scheme in which they have to play a part, are alike provided for, is too well known to require illustration here. Some obvious end of utility or beauty fully justifies Digby Wyatt's observation that "infinite variety and unerring fitness govern all forms in Nature." Vitruvius had also perceived that "the perfection of all works depends on their fitness to answer the end purposed, and on principles resulting from a consideration of Nature herself." And Sir Charles Eastlake, carrying on the same thought, discerned that "in every case where fitness or utility can be traced, the characteristic quality or *relative* beauty is found to be identified with that of fitness." This lesson the Japanese have thoroughly mastered by their observation of Nature, though chiefly confining their study to plants, flowers, fruit, and birds. They never seem, as I have already observed, to have carried their studies into the higher classes of animal life—the mammalia, and man, the chief and head. They appear, on the contrary, to have found all that they cared for in the inanimate

world, and in birds, insects, and fishes. There was a boundary line which apparently limited their field of vision. We see the result, and are continually reminded of such limitation in their works.

Despite this disadvantage, the Japanese have displayed great power of depicting, in graphic form, the popular life and emotions, and with such marvellous facility that a few touches of the artist's flowing pencil for the purpose often suffice. And I agree, therefore, with Mr. Jarves when he says that perhaps no European can with the same small expenditure of labour put so much information, life, and humour into the same space of paper. Alluding to the Consular Reports, in which some fac-simile reproductions of rough Japanese sketches of tea-making are given, he observes, "In every face there is mirth, and mirth so expressed that one almost seems to hear the merry talk which makes every face look so jovial." And referring to the popular picture-books, he further remarks, very happily, that whatever the subject, "it is executed with a realistic swing of pencil and *naïveté* of expression that commend it to the sight as actual life itself. So simply, for with so few strokes and touches, so much reserved power and so little artifice, is the 'occult' mechanism of humanity revealed to us that we seem to have a clairvoyant insight into the consciousness of their actions. This inner being of the object shown constitutes its chiefest identity; and is evoked by such slight technical means, that at first we overlook its wonderful artistic simplicity in admiration of the spirit of the composition on the whole."

XI.

We are led by these considerations to conclude that the love of Art is a form of development of organs common to all mankind, but in such various degrees, and so shaped and controlled in its manifestations by other faculties and instinctive tendencies, that what really determines its ultimate form and growth cannot be easily understood. Its universality in different ages and countries would seem to point to some natural gift and instinctive want common to the human organization. And, as with all natural capacities and appetites, there is pleasure in their free exercise and gratification, so it is with the inbred love of Art. The strange relics of drawings left by the cave-dwellers on the surface of bones would seem to be evidence of the existence of an Art instinct, the manifestation of which gave pleasure to a race very low in the scale of mental capacity or development. Progress in Art, therefore, can scarcely be accepted as due either alone or chiefly to superior mental culture and civilisation. Neither will such mental culture nor any superiority of civilisation necessarily produce progress in the Arts. Indeed, a review of the history of Art in all countries leaves us embarrassed with the great variety in the modes of manifestation, even when the Art faculty or æsthetic feeling has been, undoubtedly, in a state of high development. The Assyrians and Egyptians were both given to pictorial representations of all that most profoundly moved or deeply interested them. Their conquests in this world

and their destiny in another, alike gave employment to the sculptor's chisel and the artist's pencil. The ancient races of India have left abundant evidences of artistic culture. And coming down to the Greeks, who, after carrying Art to the highest point yet attained, became unaccountably lost to all artistic feeling, we see both variety and alternations of the most perplexing kind. Over the breadth of Asia among the Mogul, Tartar, and Turcoman races, the feeling for Art in any form seems to have been absolutely wanting. I saw, some few years ago it is true, the commencement at Constantinople of a State Museum for the preservation of remains of Greek and Roman Art; but ever since the conquest they have, with stolid apathy and ignorance, been trampling such relics under foot, or burning them to make lime and mortar with which to build their mosques and squalid houses. This founding of a museum, therefore, can only be viewed as something purely exotic in origin.* Thus, however widely spread in all ages may

* While this sheet is going through the press, I have received from a friendly critic a protest against the judgment conveyed in this passage, as regards the Turks more especially. He has lived among them, and is certainly more familiar both with the country and the people than I am, besides having a large knowledge of Art; and I think it is but fair to the objects of my criticism to reproduce his comments. To my observation about "squalid" houses, it is replied that they are "not at all squalid, but very often beautiful wooden houses of a fine type." As to the more general scope of the passage complained of, in which "Turks and Tartars are accused of having no sense of the beautiful or use of the Fine Arts," it is urged that "the Turks have the same sort of sense of beauty and fitness in decorative Art applied to material objects that other Orientals have. In fact, really everything about Turkish Art *was* beautiful till European elements invaded it. Everything they had, made, wore, *was* beautiful. I dare say they did not know it, but neither did the

have been the first rudimentary germs of Art,—as regards the Art faculty in any high state of development, the range has always been very limited, and more or less fitful in its distribution both as to locality and race.

The æsthetic history of the Japanese is to be read by the light of these elementary facts. The lesson which their Art progress reveals, further points to the conclusion which an eloquent French writer* never failed to insist upon during a literary life of five-and-forty years, that Art, like everything which is worth having or worth doing, is the result and outcome of a certain inward and spiritual state, while those who succeed, succeed through delight in their work and devotion to an impersonal, if not a lofty aim. I cannot but hold this to be true, although I am aware it may be, and has been, urged that decorative Art is often a mere inheritance or tradition. And as Mr. Ruskin has no less constantly taught, in order to represent anything well, we must love to look on it, and in order to love anything well, we must love to do it, quite apart from Persians nor Indians. Shops, houses, tombs, mosques, fountains—dress, carriages, arms, &c.—all were beautiful, and many things were convenient and useful. It is true they had no sense of the beauty of pieces of Greek statuary, but these were idols. They had their *share* of Saracen Art, and a type of their own, a simple, noble type—witness the mosques of Solyman and Achmet, the fountain at Tophana, and a thousand things besides.” I may have overstated both their apathy and want of æsthetic qualities, but I cannot altogether revoke my opinion, for I have given in the context the actual impression made upon me by what I observed when in the Levant and at Constantinople in 1875.

* Georges Sand. See article on Art in the *Nineteenth Century* for April, 1877, by W. H. Myers.

all thought of rivalry, or profit, or fame. Here lies, I believe, another source of that distinguishing feature of Japanese Art work, its thoroughness of finish and elaboration of design. This, and the further fact that the artist and workman are so frequently one—not two, as with us. Sir Joshua Reynolds spoke most truly when he said, "It cannot be by chance that excellences are produced with any constancy or certainty, for this is not the nature of chance."

XII.

There are many other novel and interesting questions suggested by the *Kunst-leben*, or Art-life of this people, so different in its development and characteristics from that of all other nations. How is it, for instance, that the Japanese, true lovers of Art, and thoroughly artistic in tendency, not only do not seek types of beauty in either sex, but allow their women to deform themselves, on betrothal or marriage, by blacking their teeth and shaving off their eyebrows, without which the face loses its most graceful finish? How is it that they can take such real delight in birds and flowers, in trees and sky and water, and all that constitutes what is most beautiful in Nature, and none in the human form? It has been held in every great school of Art that the study of the human figure is essential to artistic excellence; and that without this primary knowledge, there is no power to render any of its actions with grace and truth.

For, even in a draped figure, if it be graceful, the nude is always divined beneath the drapery, and the dress is but an expression added. Yet the Japanese neither has such knowledge nor seeks to gain it.

XIII.

We are led by such reflections to speculate on the range of moral qualities and emotions with which Japanese Art deals. This is a problem, however, which scarcely admits of solution by any categoric answer. The sentiment of love between man and woman in the first and purest inspiration appears to be wanting; but a certain kind of home and family love takes its place. And accordingly, they can and do express in their artistic work domesticity, and the love of children in many forms. I am the more confirmed in this view by the fact that, so far as I have ever observed, the Japanese, unlike the Greeks and the Romans, have no voluptuous Art, though they are not strangers to indecency and obscenity under the painter's brush. In this they travel rather in the coarse lines of a low Dutch school, than the more refined productions of Giulio Romano and other sensuous painters of the Italian schools. The truth is, the representations of love in any of their artistic works are so rare and indirect, that one doubts how far they have any conception of the sentiment, as we understand it—a mixture of worship, sympathy, and passion. And if this be so, may it not

in a great degree explain a defective sense of beauty in the human form? This, again, would go far to account for the absence of gracefulness in their Art, whenever they leave those realms of Nature where flowers and birds alone are the objects of their admiration.

The Japanese, without being superstitious in any striking degree, appear to have a deep sense of the unseen world on the "night side" of Nature. In bizarre and ghastly manifestations or imaginings they excel, but I doubt if there be in them any true devotional feeling. The organ of veneration seems greatly deficient in their nature. Of worship, praise, or prayer the graphic representations are very few. The interiors of temples, the *bonzes* ministering, and worshippers within or without, in the form of spectators, may be found. But, so far as I have seen, the Japanese have no religious Art—no Art for edification or adoration. This may be from some original defect in their nature; or is it only because everything has been run into conventional forms and moulds, as in India and elsewhere, and has thus ceased to appeal to the higher religious sense, which finds expression in a spirit of adoration? How otherwise is this to be explained? A nation of artists, with no religious Art. Is it not in contradiction to all the experience and past history of Western nations?

Again we are met by another condition, unique in kind. There is no portrait-painting in Japan. It would seem that it has not entered into the minds of the Japanese to desire portraits of their friends and relations, living or deceased. This is the more remarkable because

the Japanese, like the Chinese, have a great deal of ancestral worship. And yet they have never cared to have any portraits of those ancestors, or to hand down to their posterity the lineaments of those they are to hold in so much honour and reverence! We have no worship of ancestors in Europe, though there may be traces of it in the popular respect manifested for those who can boast a distinguished ancestry through many centuries. But from the days of the Pharaohs and the Assyrians, there has always been a strong and almost instinctive desire to perpetuate and transmit to descendants the effigy of those who preceded them. To the Japanese, innocent of any pretence at portrait-painting, the introduction of photography must have been like the revelation of a new world, sent to supply a want till then unfelt! And it is curious enough, that in this, inverting the natural order in commercial matters, the supply has been found to create a demand and rapidly develop a new want, so that Japan at the present moment probably offers the best field for photographers.

These are a few of the topics suggested by a comprehensive view of Japanese Art, and its chief excellences and defects. Some, it will be seen, present problems which scarcely admit of any very certain or satisfactory solution; but whether solved or not, they afford legitimate subjects of inquiry, neither deficient in interest nor importance.

XIV.

Before leaving the more general attributes and characteristics of Japanese Art, and its power in moulding the national mind,—the influence of the Art faculty, and its cultivation on individuals and classes, may engage our attention for a few moments.

In the first place, I fear we must admit that a mere love of Art, even in its best form, or the greatest skill in rendering its higher inspirations by painting or sculpture, by no means secures immunity from the baser instincts and passions. Artists, as a class, claim no such elevation above the less cultured. In other words, poets, painters, sculptors, architects, and musicians enjoy no exemption from the pains and penalties of human nature. Love of Art, and great excellence in artistic work, did not give very elevated sentiments to Benvenuto Cellini, or prevent his glorying in assassination and deeds of blood and violence. They are generally classed by common experience as a *genus irritabile*, and of uncertain commerce in social life. Refinement in sentiment, and in artistic work, is not always accompanied by similar characteristics in their intercourse with their fellow-men. Upon the whole, it would appear that we may easily exaggerate the value of Art either as a humanising or an elevating influence. This is not the popular idea, however. Mr. Jarves much more correctly, I believe, expresses the general opinion when he observes, “It is noteworthy that fine manners, diversely emphasized according to ranks and conditions, graceful

and elaborate in highest society, simple and winning in lower, as a general rule, characterize people who have a genuine feeling for whatever is artistic and beautiful. This disposition seems to exercise a reflex influence on all the faculties, by putting the entire soul in sympathy with the refinement and æsthetic culture that comes of a devotion to true Art." It seems only natural it should be so, but the world's history and common experience are far from lending confirmation to the theory. The Greeks, with their æsthetic nature, were not patterns of the corresponding moral qualities; and the Romans, who cultivated the Arts very generally, were as ruthless and savage in their lives as any of the less-civilised nations whom they brought under subjection. The Italians and Spaniards, when Art in modern times reached its highest and best development, were in like manner steeped in crime and violence, the first under the rule of the Borgias and generations of degenerate nobles and princes, and the second under that of the Inquisition and a fanatic priesthood. If Art softened and refined their manners, it did not prevent other influences hardening their hearts and depraving their minds.

Mr. Matthew Arnold in a lecture on Social Equality, lately delivered at the Royal Institution, and since printed in the *Contemporary*, has defined civilisation as the humanisation of man, and pointed out that in the advance to it, there are several lines in which the Hebrews and the Greeks were specially pre-eminent. In England there is the power of conduct; in Italy, the

feeling for beauty; in Germany, the power of thorough scientific knowledge; while in France there is the power of social life and manners, by which they are inevitably drawn towards an equality which consists in general well-being, and manifests itself even in the superior manners and intelligence of the peasantry, as contrasted with our own, although quite as ignorant. Now, among the several lines here indicated as tending to the humanisation, and therefore to the civilisation of different races and nations, that of Art—and the feeling for beauty, which is its source—may fairly be classed as one of the great influences specially pre-eminent with the Japanese. To it I believe may be attributed the refinement of manner common to all ranks and classes of the Japanese, despite complete ignorance of all that constitutes scientific knowledge in Europe. Their love of Nature and sense of beauty, with the Art culture that followed, may have stood in lieu of education and proved no inefficient substitute.

The conclusion which would be alone justified by such a survey is not, I am afraid, altogether as satisfactory as all true lovers of Art would desire. If the love of Art and its successful cultivation tend to impart a certain refinement of mind perceptible in polished manners and courteous habits of intercourse, such as we find in China and Japan, even among the mass of the people and the unlettered, it does not penetrate deep enough to counteract other and dominant influences, which have a tendency to shape all the issues of life and national character. In a word, the beneficent influence of

Art in its best phase is but of a limited kind, and cannot therefore be ranked high among the civilising agencies.

Michael Angelo said the intent of Fine Art was to raise our intellect from earth to heaven; and to refine and to idealize is no doubt one of the great ends of Art. Moreover, whatever tends to cultivate a sense of fitness and beauty combined, in all the surroundings of life, fulfils this object to a great degree. But we must not demand of it more than can legitimately be expected on a retrospect of the world's experience. We have evidence enough, not in Japan alone, but wherever Art in any form has flourished, that it has a great part in a nation's life and development, as characterized by the Germans in their *Kunst-leben*. Art they considered ennobles much which would otherwise be mean and sordid in the industrial efforts made to minister to the daily wants of mankind. That it does not more efficaciously neutralise or destroy the evil passions of mankind and all their lower instincts, we may regret, but it can be no reproach to Art to fail, where Christianity itself does not succeed.

XV.

These general data have a certain bearing on the final outcome of the Art Industries in Japan. Whoever studies Japanese Art in all its forms, will discern, without fail, that among the first effects of such training as

the Art faculty of the Japanese undergoes, is the constant association of mind and hand.

The fancy that designs and the hand that executes, giving form and substance to the ideal and mental conception, belong almost always to the same worker. The feeling of the artist gives vigour, truth, and delicacy of touch to the pliant hand, and the result is such as never can be achieved by a divided effort—the brain of one man and the hand of another. The Art productions of Japan display the result in the exquisite feeling shown throughout their decorative designs. It is very seldom possible to detect any hardness or imperfect realisation of the design, in laboured or unintelligent execution. There are, on the contrary, sympathetic touches which generally reveal the artist. It is to this that Mr. Jarves alludes when he says, “This clearly proves that the workman is in all cases the artist, and that he is not merely reproducing in his peculiar material the designs created by the fancy of others. In Japan, therefore, we find in every branch of Art manufacture what we so much want in our own land—the *artist-workman*. Combined with his artistic feeling, the artisan of Japan shows the greatest skill in manipulating the almost countless materials he presses into his service. His tools are few and of the simplest description.”

A writer in one of the weekly papers not long ago remarked, with some truth, that English taste was killing Japanese Art. “Everywhere there is a tendency to imitate European forms and patterns. And it may well seem extraordinary that it should be so, seeing that

there is no Art in the world so individualised, so perfect in its conventional idealization and technical expression, as that of Japan. A similar process has been going on in India, and as a necessary consequence, several of the Indian manufacturers are losing all which distinguished them."

It may be some counterpoise to this to remark, that whatever may be the tendency to imitation in Japan, the era of "*Japonism*" which has overtaken Europe is to be traced not only in Keramic productions, but in bronzes, textile fabrics, papers—in the whole range of Art manufacture in Europe. A visit to the great Exhibition in Paris will abundantly establish the fact. In Pottery, in Faience, and in Porcelain not only forms, designs, and colours are almost servilely copied and reproduced with only such difference as inferiority of material, or skill and taste impose, but even to the crackling so long distinctive of Chinese and Japanese Keramic ware, that has now been introduced into the French Art pottery. If the Japanese are losing their own original taste, the Western nations, it is hoped, may gain by its adoption. At least let us hope, if we are to lose the only living school of decorative Art in existence, as Mr. Palgrave fears, that in this demand now so universal for Japanese objects and patterns, which are accordingly being reproduced in a more or less crude and indiscriminate way, we may, before the original is wholly lost and degraded, learn from it the principles, and some of the technical processes, which underlie the excellence.

I have indeed a melancholy conviction of the transitory nature of the excellence which all must admire in Japanese work. Much of its beauty and its excellence is passing away even now, from various causes, among the chief of which is the sudden and undiscriminating demand created by foreigners, which soon exceeded the supply of really superior work, while it encouraged the production of inferior articles to meet the all-absorbing demands of ship-captains and wholesale exporters for European markets. Next came the revolution, due also to foreign intrusion, by which the best patrons of Art in Japan—the Daimios, or feudal princes of the skilled workman—were swept away in the torrent. Some indeed survive, but their prestige and fortunes, by which the most costly efforts of the Japanese artist were encouraged, exist no longer. The sudden rage for European civilisation, European ideas and knowledge, which we have witnessed in Japan of late years, the immediate result of which was the undue depreciation of what was good in their native institutions and work, and the imitation of all that was foreign, has tended to impair their originality. The impulsive desire to become cosmopolitan at a single leap, after having been the most stationary and isolated of Eastern races, had a fatal tendency to denationalise them. In seeking too hastily to snatch the secrets of European superiority, and reap its fruits, without the toil and the slow growth of centuries of which it was the produce, they are daily losing much that was most distinctive, and not a little that was truly valuable.

Mr. Jarves in his work on Japanese Art bears his testimony to this deteriorating process, and expresses a conviction "that the true secret of the Japanese power of expression and delineation, as well as the beauty and originality of his Art work, lies in the intimate knowledge the workman possesses of those multifarious, versatile, and mobile models drawn from the minor forms of Nature, so profoundly but deliberately comprehended by the Japanese artist and workman, who in general are identical." "Every effort," he adds, "I have yet seen on the part of their European rivals to reproduce Japanese decorative Art in the style and spirit of the original, only serves to show there is still an impassable gulf between the technical elements as well as ideas of the Asiatic and European Art work."

The Japanese workman is an artist, and it is in the union in one of the excellency of both that we must seek to rival Japanese work. A great step in this direction has been made, as I have pointed out, in the establishment of a school and manufacture of Art Pottery at Doulton's works in Lambeth.* We may best form a true estimate of any Art by its power of technically rendering the semblance of material objects—or by its suggestiveness as a manifestation of a ruling thought, or mere spiritual motive. Probably the combination of both, more or less perfectly, is essential to any excellence, or any full sense of satisfaction in the work. In the one we copy, and in the other invent, but

* See Chapter XI., p 200.

even the copy must have mind in the imitation, and the invention must not depart too widely from a true perception of natural forms. The Chinese may produce a dragon full of vigour and vital force, which, though unlike anything on land or water, is nevertheless artistic, because we recognise it as mythic—an image not too far removed from a possible creation of some material form, and an ideal conception of character consistent in all its parts.

Both the Chinese and the Japanese idea of an eclipse, for instance, is represented by a dragon advancing amidst stormy clouds to swallow the earth, appearing as a golden orb about to be enveloped in darkness. The dragon is a favourite ornament, symbolic of imperial power and majesty, and is always as vigorous and rampant as it is grotesque, and well adapted to ornament. I have wardrobes, brought from Peking, on the panels of which are carved, in dark wood, imperial dragons in the midst of clouds, admirable alike in execution and vigorous design. Others again represent the mythic bird, the Ho-Ho, also symbolic of imperial majesty, in the midst of the flowering peony, but all are carved in the most graceful and vigorous forms, and in the true spirit of the best decorative Art. That is, they embody in forms a mental idea which has been suggested by Nature, but is not to be found in any actually existing object. They take an idea from some natural object, and embody the spirit without any close imitation of the actual form, but consistent in all its parts with the original conception. They invent and do not copy, and

so give to their work a combination of technical skill and mental power.

The Japanese are in like manner much given to the production of monsters, in whom, as Mr. Jarves remarks, "each member and function is antagonistic to its neighbours, but so plausibly constructed as to make the whole appear vitally sound and well adapted to its own ends in life, and which could only be generated in imaginations steeped in a belief in their possible existence. The *rococo* grotesques of Europe are wanting in this principle. Besides being stupidly ugly and imbecile in motive, they are far less original in thought, and have no organic life, truth of instinct, or reason of being. Not even a Raphael or Razzi could impart to their bizarre fancies the constitutional verity of existence which animates the Japanese designs, and still less bestow on them a corresponding dignity and purpose of characterization."

XVI.

As portrayers of life and manners, however, it appears to me the Japanese artists distinguish themselves most. A mass of cheap pictorial books form the literature of the common people, many executed by their best artists as woodcuts, either plain or in colours. They are printed from blocks at a single impression, we are told, on a thin soft paper delicately toned, from which a peculiarly clear yet softened impres-

sion is obtained, such as may well be the despair of European workmen, for they cannot approach it. The Japanese are most skilful engravers on wood, and contrive to get the very best qualities out of all the materials used. We had no woodcuts of a cheap and popular kind fifty years ago, before the era of *Punch*, the *Illustrated London News*, *Graphic*, &c., which would bear comparison with the varied excellence of their popular books by Hoffskai and later artists.* Consisting chiefly of illustrations with a small rivulet of text, they constitute the literature of the people, embodying their history, mythology, religion, amusements, trades, and, in a word, the entire life of the nation treated pictorially. The influence of such pictorial teaching, in its simplicity and limited scope, upon their æsthetical development must, I think, have been considerable.

They seem to have asked for nothing better of this world than such delights as the enjoyment of Nature gave them, combined with a peaceful and industrious life. Their Arts, literature, and philosophy all reflect this constitution of mind. When they came, in the middle of the sixteenth century, into contact with European and Christian nations, I am afraid, as Mr. Jarves remarks, they saw nothing to make them envy the hundred millions who worshipped "the Prince of Peace, and in His abused name were cutting each other's throats, destroying each other's property, tortur-

* The woodcuts of the sixteenth century in Germany had much of this character, as may be seen by the cuts of Albert Dürer of the period, on popular subjects and others.

ing and proselytizing by rack and flames, and all this out of a tender regard for each other's eternal welfare."

I do not, however, concur in his opinion that "the religious motive is the Alpha and Omega of inspiration of all Art, of all races, as regards its influence and power." It has neither been the inspiring motive of all Art, nor, in my opinion, of all races, though it may supply the highest, and since the dark ages it has undoubtedly prevailed to a large extent, and given a character to much of the best Art of Europe. But even in that Christian Art, its degradation to spurious objects and purposes, and a debasing superstition (whether or not to the extent Mr. Jarves would maintain), cannot be disputed. All Art consecrated to religious uses cannot, therefore, be "placed on an equal footing," even as regards its "fundamental motive;" and when the religion itself is spurious, superstitious, or idolatrous, it rather tends to debase than to elevate the Art it influences.

With these concluding remarks on the special character of all Japanese Art, and the influences controlling its growth and final development, I must now bring this general summary to a close. Art in Japan, and the industrial Arts more especially, which have been brought to their present state of perfection by the application of principles mainly derived from their loving and patient study of Nature, may serve as an example full of encouragement to our own manufacturers and artisans. They may see in the unequalled success of the Japanese, artist and workman combined in one—how

originality and the impress of individual genius may best be secured for the conceptions of the brain and the skilled work of the hand. The lesson to be derived from all we see and know of Japanese Art is one, indeed, of universal application, and it is this—that only those who love their work, and find satisfaction in its excellence, can feel true pleasure in anything they undertake. And it is always worth while, therefore, to put our best powers forth in whatever we engage in, because we can only find pleasure in doing that which we do well. With this consciousness, and the ease which attends all work under these conditions, there is scarcely any labour, however humble or uninspiring, which does not bring something of pleasure and satisfaction with it. We may not all become artists, or produce by any amount of effort works of Art. There must be some original gift and special aptitudes to that end. But the Japanese as a nation have shown how thousands of the artisan and working classes in succeeding ages, with no higher culture or instruction than Nature affords, can labour in this field with satisfaction to themselves, and the greatest advantage to Art in its many forms, and contribute to the unrivalled excellence of Art Industries, which now gives their country and nation a great and enviable pre-eminence throughout the civilised world.

THE END.



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